

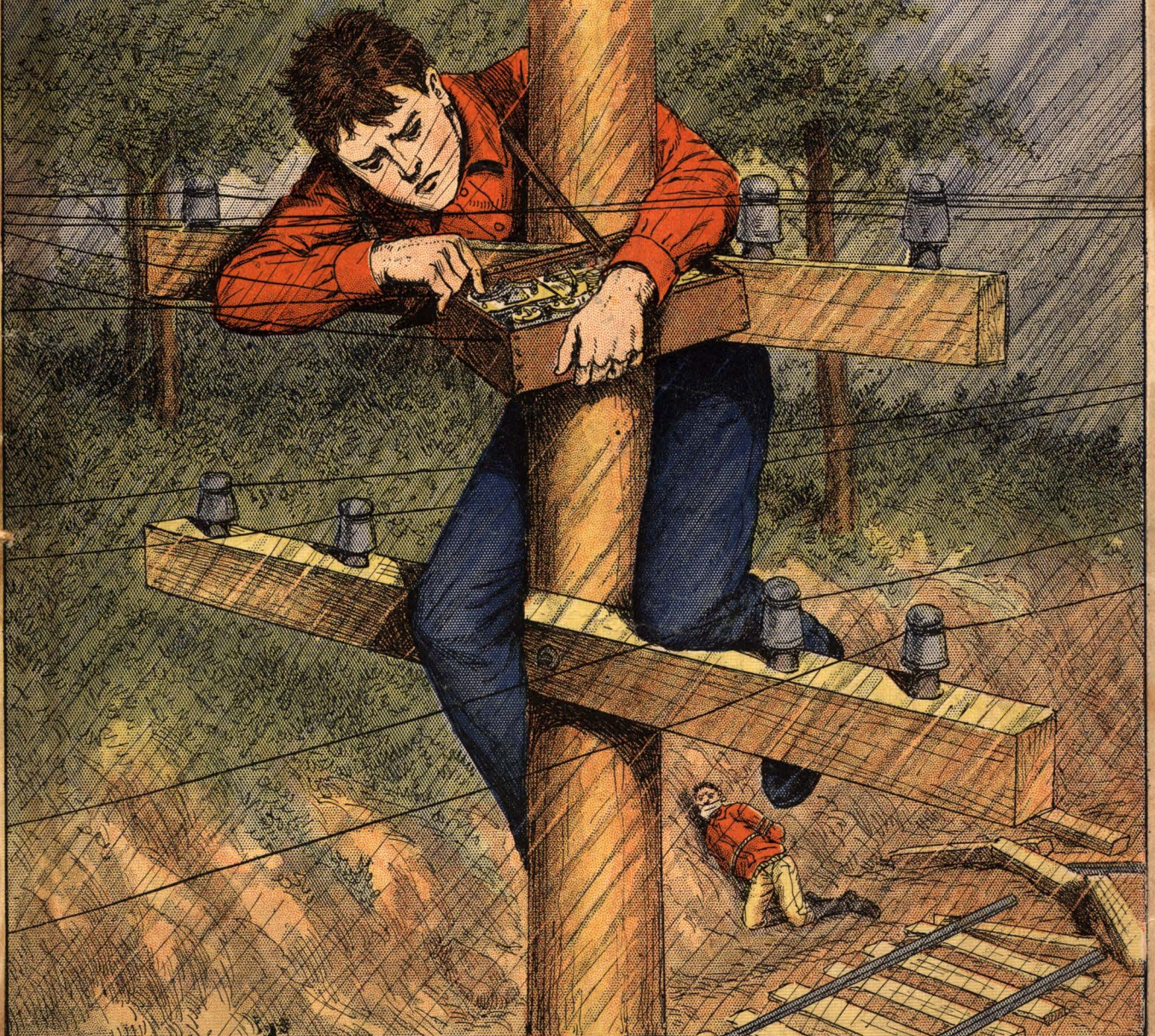
No 13.

5 cents.

WIDE AWAKE

A COMPLETE STORY **WEEKLY**. EVERY WEEK.

THE GREAT GAUL "BEAT";
OR, PHIL WINSTON'S START IN REPORTING. *By HOWARD DEWITT.*



Click! click! came the answer. Phil's heart bounded with joy. "Hold the express—track wrecked!" he flashed. "Too late—train passed a minute ago!" The young reporter almost toppled from his perch. His fight for life had been useless.

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Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1906, in the office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by Frank Tousey, Publisher, 24 Union Square, New York.

No. 13.

NEW YORK, JULY 13, 1906.

PRICE 5 CENTS.

The Great Gaul "Beat"

OR,

PHIL WINSTON'S START IN REPORTING

By HARRY M. LANE
A. HOWARD DE WITT

CHAPTER I.

THE "KID" REPORTER AIMS HIGH.

"I wish something big would turn up," half-sighed Phil Winston.

"Why?" asked Crosby, the assistant city editor of the "Morning Globe."

"Oh, I'd like a chance to get hold of something besides the small-fry news," Phil replied.

"If something big turned up an older reporter would be sent out on the case," replied Crosby, without looking up from the paper that he was "going over" with a blue pencil.

"Yes; an older man would get it, I suppose," sighed Phil.

This time Crosby looked up from his work. He eyed the boy keenly.

"Winston, you take my word for it—if you were sent out on a big news story, you'd probably fall down on it. That would wind up your career in this office, you know."

"I don't believe I would fall down on the story," Phil rejoined, with an air of conviction.

"It happens, once in a thousand years," Crosby half-sneered, "that a kid reporter goes out after a big news story—and gets it. But the old, time-honored way is best, my boy. A kid reporter should go by easy stages from small stories to big ones. If he climbs slowly, the kid gets his wits sharpened. But you'll understand that better when you've been in the business as long as I have."

And Crosby, who had been a kid reporter himself, and

who was not now many days past his twenty-third birthday, returned to his work with a bored air.

Phil Winston was only seventeen.

He had been in the "Globe" office just three weeks.

From a little country home up in the State he had come to the great city, leaving behind a mother who was firmly convinced that her son would soon become one of the greatest editors in the country.

Up to three weeks ago Phil had been in the High School of his native town.

During the last two years, while attending school, he had also been writing for the weekly in his town.

But Winston was never content to "stay where he was put."

Work on a country newspaper had filled him with an ambition to get into the life of the newspaper reporter in a great city.

Armed with useless letters of recommendation from the country editor, and provided with many clippings of his published work, Phil had come to town.

By sheer pushing and "cheek" he had induced the city editor of the "Globe" to give him a chance as a reporter.

Every newspaper office has two or three "kids" among its reporters.

The astonishing thing about it is that often, within a few weeks or a few months, the "kid" develops real talent as a newspaper reporter.

Phil's salary, at the start, was eight dollars a week. This is the usual salary for a "kid" in a newspaper office.

In the office the "kid" ranks only a step above the office boy, who receives four or five dollars a week.

Often, very often, indeed, the office boy graduates into a "kid" reporter.

Eaton, the city editor, had strongly advised Phil to begin as an office boy.

But our hero, with his usual mixture of ambition and stubbornness, had insisted that he was fitted to begin on the "Globe" as a "kid" reporter.

And here he was—already beginning to feel dissatisfied with the slow advancement of the newspaper "kid."

For a long time it generally isn't much that falls to the lot of the boy reporter.

A good deal of the time he has to hang around the office, occasionally taking an item that comes in over the telephone.

This he writes up and turns into the news desk. This "desk" is in charge of the news editor, aided by assistants.

The news editor's assistants read the "kid's" "copy," correct it and send it up to the printer.

The city editor and his assistants have charge of the reporters. It is the work of the city editor, or his assistant, to send out the reporters on different tasks of gathering news.

When the reporter has got his news, he writes it out and turns his "copy" in to the news desk. The city editor attends to getting the news; the news editor decides what news shall be used, how much of it, etc.

It was just after three o'clock in the afternoon now.

Phil had reported at the office, with the rest of the earlier part of the staff, at noon. Ordinarily he was through at about ten o'clock at night.

Another squad of the reporters arrived at the office at five o'clock and remained until the paper went to press at three o'clock in the morning.

In all, there were on the "Globe" staff some thirty reporters who looked after the news of the great city.

Just at this moment Phil was the only reporter left in the office.

He had had an "assignment," as a reporter's task is called, to "cover"—that is, to report—the annual meeting of the Great Gaul & Western Railway directors.

That meeting had been called for two o'clock in the afternoon. Owing to the non-arrival of some of the out-of-town directors of the railway, the meeting had been adjourned to four o'clock.

So now Phil was loafing around the office, waiting until quarter of four, when it would be time to leave the office and hurry over to the offices of the Great Gaul & Western.

Jingle-jang! Mr. Crosby picked up the receiver of his desk telephone.

"Eh? What's that?" he asked. "Foul play suspected? Prentiss never known to break an appointment. Mystery, eh? Good thing, Sullivan! Follow it up hot!" rang the assistant city editor's voice over the wire.

Phil, standing close enough to hear, pricked up his ears.

But before he could speak Crosby wheeled upon him.

"Winston, my boy, you may have as good a bit of news as you want to handle. At a little after two o'clock Ber-

tram Prentiss, president of the Great Gaul & Western, left his offices at the railway station. He went alone, saying that he was going out for just a few minutes, and left an appointment to be back with the treasurer and auditor of the road for a conference with them at three o'clock. Prentiss is known as a man who never breaks an appointment. Already the directors are worried. They've telephoned police headquarters and all the hospitals, and feel sure that Prentiss hasn't met with an accident. So they're sure it's foul play. It's nearly half-past three now. Hustle right down to the G. & W. offices. If Prentiss comes in, telephone us right away. If he doesn't come, keep us advised of anything that you hear. Hustle, and keep your eyes open. If Prentiss doesn't show up in half an hour, I'll manage to get hold of some of our older men and get them started on the case. If Prentiss disappears, it'll be the sensation of the day, for he's one of our biggest money-men. Hustle!"

But that last word was hardly necessary.

Phil was already half-way down the three flights of stairs that led to the street. He was in such haste, in fact, that he had no time to wait for the elevator.

On the street he traveled fast. In less than ten minutes he hustled into the directors' room at the G. & W. main offices.

"Is Mr. Prentiss back yet?" he inquired of a passing clerk.

"Can't say," jerked out the clerk, hastening on.

"That means he doesn't want to. Perhaps he's been told to keep his mouth shut," murmured Phil to himself.

But the other men sitting or standing in the great room—most of them directors of the road—were plainly excited about something.

As these men talked mostly in undertones, Phil did not approach any of them to put direct questions.

But he strolled, as if aimlessly, until he stood behind one of the larger groups.

"If anything has really happened to Prentiss just now," he heard one of these men declare, "it will put the G. & W. in a bad fix."

"Had Prentiss any enemies?" asked another director. Listening, Phil pricked up his ears.

"No enemies that anyone knows of," replied another director.

Phil Winston turned away to hide a significant smile.

"That's all you gentlemen know about it," muttered the boy reporter to himself. "I think I could open your eyes a bit—though I may be wrong."

For Phil, while at these same offices earlier in the afternoon, had witnessed one significant thing.

He had been in this same room, close to the door of the president's private office, when his gaze had been caught by the approach of two young people.

One of these was an average-looking young man of fashion—a fellow about twenty-four years of age, well-set-up, elegantly dressed, dark, about five-feet-ten, and with a closely-cropped black mustache.

Phil had had an instant idea that he didn't like the fellow's looks.

As for the girl, the young reporter couldn't help liking her at the first glance.

She was about our hero's own height, which was five-feet-six, blonde and willowy, and distractingly pretty.

The girl had appeared to be about seventeen years old.

These two young people had come in laughing and chatting, as if used to being together.

Halting near the president's door, they had spoken a few words to a clerk, who disappeared into the president's office.

Almost in a twinkling President Bertram Prentiss, of the Great Gaul & Western Railway, had stepped to the door, smiling, and with both hands outstretched.

President Prentiss shook hands with both of the young people at once.

"Beth, my child, you know how delighted I would be to have you here on any afternoon but this."

"It was mostly Fred's fault," smiled the girl.

"Fred, my dear boy, is it anything that won't keep until this evening?" inquired Mr. Prentiss, turning to the young man with just a shade of anxiety in his face.

"I would like your ear for one moment, uncle," replied the nephew of the great man.

"Now, then, and in haste," rejoined the railway president, slipping his arm through that of the young man and leading him aside.

The girl stood there, smiling carelessly, while Mr. Prentiss and his nephew talked in earnest undertones a few yards away.

Then uncle and nephew came back to the girl, both looking as if the conversation had not been wholly a pleasant one.

"All right, Fred Carroll, boy," Phil heard the railway man say.

"Thank you, uncle. It will be the greatest favor."

"Beth, child, come into my office for just a moment," added her father, and led the girl past the swinging door.

Then, for just an instant, Phil caught sight of a sudden blackness in Fred Carroll's face.

Left by himself, the nephew gritted his teeth, smiled snarlingly, and slightly shook one clenched fist after the disappearing pair.

But Carroll quickly recovered himself, before any but young Winston had observed this by-play.

By the time that Carroll had turned about Phil was looking in another direction.

It was this scene that our hero now remembered, as he heard the directors discussing the disappearance of Bertram Prentiss.

"If that dark-eyed young nephew isn't Prentiss's enemy then I'm a bad guesser," muttered the young reporter.

There was nothing more in the talk of these men to interest the young reporter.

So he stepped forward, boldly.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," he began, "but can you tell me when I'm likely to be able to see Mr. Prentiss?"

"That's what we'd all like to know," retorted one of the directors.

"Then he isn't here?" Phil persisted.

"Not a sign of him!"

Phil hurried to a telephone pay station in another part of the great building and informed Crosby.

"Stay there and watch," was Crosby's order.

So back to the directors' room went our hero.

Reporters for rival newspapers were there by this time.

Stepping forward, the vice-president of the railway called loudly:

"I will ask the gentlemen of the press to withdraw from the room. They will be informed, presently, of any action taken that can interest the public."

Phil found himself out in the corridor with half a dozen other reporters.

"Going to guess where their president is, I suppose," grunted Charley Jenkins, of the "Herald." "They're making a hullabaloo about his being a few minutes late."

"But it seems that Prentiss never has been a few minutes late before," rejoined another reporter.

"There always has to be a first time," sniffed Jenkins.

The other reporters seemed to have no opinion one way or the other.

They were a keen-eyed lot of young men, used to running through the big city at all times of the day or night after the news of the day's doings.

"Your paper got any men out looking for Prentiss?" asked one reporter of another.

"Don't believe they have yet," came the reply. "Time enough to look for the old man when he has sure enough vanished."

Phil listened, but had nothing to say.

A door opened and a clerk came out.

"Gentlemen of the press," came the announcement, "in the absence of President Prentiss, the directors have adjourned their meeting until ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"But what about Mr. Prentiss?" called several of the reporters.

"All we know, gentlemen, is that Mr. Prentiss is absent."

"And no word——" began Jenkins, but the clerk had closed the door from the other side.

Quickly the group of reporters broke up, each going his own way.

Phil's way led him to the telephone station.

"Hasn't shown up, eh?" came Crosby's query over the wire. "What time do the G. & W. offices close?"

"Five o'clock."

"Stay there, then, until the offices close. Then, if there's no word, telephone me again."

So back to the offices upstairs went the boy. In one of the outer rooms, through which Mr. Prentiss would have to pass to reach his own office, our hero waited.

Five o'clock came, but the offices did not close. Winston had no need to ask questions. He saw anxiety written in the face of every employe and officer of the railroad that passed through the room.

Six o'clock came, but still no word of Mr. Prentiss.

His house had been telephoned to, and every effort made to get trace of the missing railway magnate.

At six o'clock, however, the offices were closed—an hour after the usual time.

Every fifteen minutes our hero had called up his office over the 'phone.

"Looks like a great story," commented Crosby, drily, over the wire. "Come back to the office. We'll send some other men out on it."

"Send some other men out on it—yes!" muttered Phil, angrily, to himself, as he hung up the receiver. "That's always the way with the poor kid in a newspaper shop! But I'll get a finger in this pie—see if I don't!"

He reached the office out of breath.

Mr. Eaton, the city editor, was now in direct charge of the city reporting staff.

To that middle-aged hustler after news Phil made his direct request to be kept on the story.

"This looks like a case that will call for our best men, I'm afraid," smiled the city editor. "Better remain in the office to-night, on call, Winston."

"On call?" snorted the boy, disgustedly, as he turned away from the city editor's room and walked back to his own desk in the great city room. "That's hot stuff—being on call. Hang around all evening, doing nothing, while other reporters are out getting all the news and the glory!"

But Eaton was a city editor who was not accustomed to giving directions twice to his reporters—to the "kids" especially.

But later in the evening he walked toward the city editor's room, in which Mr. Eaton was now being helped in the night's grind by his night assistant, Mr. Danbury.

"Excuse me," began Phil, in a low voice to Mr. Danbury. "But have the members of Mr. Prentiss's family been interviewed?"

"Oh, yes," the night assistant city editor answered, carelessly. "Claxton has had a few words with Prentiss's daughter earlier in the evening. She thinks there's nothing wrong, and has gone out to an evening function at Mrs. Grosvenor-Pyle's."

"There's a nephew, too, isn't there?" Phil hinted.

"Oh, yes; Fred Carroll. He's at the Pelham Club. Johnson has just located him there, and has gone to the club for an interview."

"Ten o'clock, Winston, so you may as well go home," spoke up City Editor Eaton.

"Thank you, sir," Phil answered.

He hurried from the office ere that gentleman had time to change his mind.

"The Pelham Club?" quivered the boy. "That's on Grauchy avenue. I remember the building."

It was some distance away, but in fifteen minutes our hero was close to the great, handsome club building.

The Pelham was the "swellest" club in the city.

Just as he neared the building Phil encountered Johnson, one of the "Globe's" older reporters.

"What are you doing up here?" hailed Phil, pleasantly.

"Just been into the club to see Fred Carroll," yawned Johnson.

"Would he talk?"

"Oh, yes; but he doesn't know any more about it than anyone else. Just says that he, like the others of the family, is wholly at a loss to account for Prentiss's disappearance. But Carroll says it will turn out all right in a few hours. I hope the office will drop this for the night, Winston. I'm due in a poker game at eleven o'clock."

"So that's one of the office's prized older men, is it?" sniffed Phil, as he watched Johnson walk briskly down the street. "Cares more about sitting in a poker game than he does about finding Mr. Prentiss. If young Carroll is in there I'll stay here all night, if necessary, but I'll see him go away!"

Crossing the street, the "kid" reporter stepped back into the shadow of a doorway.

From where he stood he could watch the main entrance to the Pelham Club.

Nor had our hero been waiting more than twenty minutes when Fred Carroll stepped out alone.

As the May night was rather warm, Carroll had his top coat unbuttoned, revealing his evening dress clothes.

With a quick, nervous step, Carroll went off down the street.

"Me for a follow," muttered Phil, starting on the trail, on the opposite side of the street.

Carroll turned three or four corners, then brought up at one of the large hotels.

As that dark-faced young man stepped into the hotel office Phil was one of the throng.

"Where's the telephone room?" Carroll inquired of a clerk.

But Phil never stopped for the answer. He knew where the telephone room was, and like a flash he made for it.

A young man, with the central-office "cap" over his head, sat at the switchboard.

Phil's hand dove like lightning into a pocket for one of the two ten-dollar bills that he owned.

"Brother, let me sit at that switchboard for five minutes, and this ten is yours," whispered Phil, bending over the operator.

He held the money so that the other could see it.

"What are you talking about?" demanded the operator, gruffly.

"It's a joke I'm playing on a bet," Phil lied glibly.

"It's all right. You won't get in any scrape. I'm a reporter on the 'Globe,'" Phil added, pulling back his coat

to display the badge on his breast. "You've got to jump, though, if you want the money. It's all right!"

That ten dollar bill looked big.

With a jump "central" took the money, took off and laid down his cap and crossed the room.

Phil was at the desk, the "cap" on, by the time that Carroll stepped into the room.

"Give me 3204 Grosvenor," said Carroll, huskily and nervously, as he dropped a dime on the table.

Phil rang up central, got the number and jabbed in a switch plug.

"In number three," directed the young reporter, without looking up.

Carroll disappeared into the closet marked "3."

Phil Winston, with his own ear sharply attuned, listened easily to what followed. It came right over the wire from Carroll's lips to the young reporter's ear. Central can always hear what is being said by users of the wire when they wish to.

"Hullo! Who is that?" asked Carroll, quickly.

"Jack," came back the answer from the other user of the wire.

"Everything all right?"

"Yes, Mr. Carroll. But give me that number again, where you want me to meet you with the cab."

"Why, 317 Cumberland avenue. Got it straight this time?"

"Yes, sir; 317."

"That's right. And be there soon."

"I will, sir."

Carroll rang off hurriedly. He came out of the closet and left the telephone room.

No sooner had the railway man's nephew left the telephone room than Winston sprang up, doffing the "cap" and leaving it there.

"I don't have to shadow you this time," murmured the young reporter. "I know where you're going to be met, and I can get there the shortest, quickest way by myself. But now why should you want a cab to meet you there, Carroll? The swiftest way would be to take a cab direct there—unless you've got some shady work in the air. Gracious!"

That last ejaculation came as something "struck" our hero just as he was passing through the hotel office.

He hurried over to a city directory, turning the leaves rapidly until he came to the name that he sought.

"Grosvenor-Pyle, 317 Cumberland avenue," read the young reporter, triumphantly. "I thought so. That's where Miss Beth Prentiss is spending the evening. And Carroll is going to be there, too, with a cab that he has specially ordered? Ordinarily Miss Beth could attend to her own carriage. This may be all straight—and it may be all crooked!"

Phil closed the directory with a bang.

"I'll be there, too!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER II.

THE BOY ON THE BOX.

In the side street around the corner from the Grosvenor-Pyle residence stood many cabs and private carriages. It was a musical night in the great house.

Guests had been driven to the door earlier in the evening.

It was now nearly time for these guests to depart, hence the waiting vehicles.

Walking up and down the line, his soft hat pulled well down over his eyes, was Phil Winston.

He had reached the corner nearest to this locality by spending some of his little, precious hoard of money on a cab for himself.

That cab was now dismissed, and the young reporter was left here on his own resources.

He had glanced into each of the waiting carriages and had discovered them all to be empty.

Now, our hero was keeping his eyes open for the expected arrival of Fred Carroll.

Nor had our hero long to wait.

"Here he comes!" murmured the boy.

He had caught sight of that now well-known figure, with the thrown-back top coat revealing the evening dress clothes.

Into a doorway stepped Phil. But from his hiding-place he watched Carroll until that young man stopped to speak to one of the drivers standing at the curb.

"They're talking quite a bit, too," throbbed watchful, anxious Phil.

Then he saw Carroll step into the carriage.

The door was closed, but the horses did not move. In fact, though Carroll was inside, the driver still remained on the sidewalk.

"Is this a wild-goose chase?" young Winston demanded of himself. "Or is something worth while really going to happen?"

"Seventy-three!" bawled a voice up the street. A carriage moved out of the group and went around into Cumberland avenue.

"Twenty-eight!" Another carriage rolled off.

"The guests are leaving," thrilled Phil. "Now's the time—in a jiffy!"

Stepping swiftly out of the doorway, he went hurriedly past the carriage in which Carroll had stepped. But in that moment of passing our hero got such a good look at the horses that he would know them again.

They were a mismatched pair—a bay and a sorrel.

Around the corner Phil walked, and up toward 317.

There were several of the departing guests now on the sidewalk in front of the big house.

Among them Phil stepped, trying to keep as much in the background as he could.

One after another the carriages rolled up to the door and took away the guests.

Three of the servants of the great house stood at the curb, assisting departing guests.

Now all of the crowd seemed to have gone. The servants were there alone, save for Phil, who lounged back against the iron fence.

"What are you doing here, boy?" demanded one of the footmen, turning suspiciously upon our hero.

"Be careful whom you call a boy," Phil retorted smilingly, and at the same time displaying his reporter's badge, which he as quickly covered again. "I'm here on business."

The footman, supposing that our hero was connected in some way with the secret service, asked no more questions.

Ten minutes more went by.

"I wonder if Carroll and his cab have skipped in some other direction?" thought our hero.

But he did not dare to leave his post to find out. If he went around the corner, a pair of fast-moving horses might make his return to this spot too late.

Next the footman went inside.

"Sold! Fooled myself!" gritted the boy, desperately.

But just at that instant a footman came out onto the stoop and raised his hand in signal to the carriage-starter down at the corner.

"Nineteen!" bawled the starter, and then vanished down the side street.

Around the corner rolled the carriage behind the mismatched pair, the sorrel and the bay.

"Now we'll know!" throbbed the boy.

He had drawn back into the areaway, hiding.

But as the closed carriage halted before No. 317 the young reporter slipped out, behind the cab, and so gained the street side of the vehicle.

"Curtains down?" quivered the young reporter, glancing at the cab door. "That sure looks queer!"

The driver was down on the sidewalk side of the carriage. Stealthy Phil easily kept hid from the fellow.

The door of the mansion opened, letting out a flood of light in which Winston beheld Beth Prentiss, looking wonderfully more beautiful than ever in her fleecy white evening dress, over which a light wrap had been thrown that only half concealed the robe.

"No; I won't trouble you. Here's my driver waiting for me. Good night."

The door of the mansion closed as Beth came lightly down the steps.

But she started back from the driver, in astonishment, if not in dismay.

"I expected our own driver here," she said. "Who are you, my man?"

"It's all right, Beth, child," came in Carroll's low voice from inside the carriage.

"Oh! Are you here, Fred?" asked the girl, eagerly.

"Yes, Beth. Williams met with an accident. So I

came in the carriage, that the strange driver might not alarm you. Step in, little girl."

"Why, this is all right, and I'm a fool," Phil told himself disgustedly.

But then, on the other side of the cab, he heard a faint sound as though the girl had started to enter the vehicle, then had drawn back.

"Beth," sounded Carroll's voice, reproachfully, "you're not afraid to drive home with me?"

"Why, surely not," Phil heard the girl answer, with an attempt at lightness, but her tone trembled slightly, notwithstanding the less.

"Does this man know our home address?" she asked.

"Certainly, Beth. Jump in, child."

Phil, in his hiding place on the other side of the carriage, heard the swish of her skirts as she stepped inside.

"Home, John," ordered Carroll, and then the further door slammed shut.

Then the driver came forward to the step to mount the box.

But things happened in a second.

Doubting Phil, his last indecision banished by the last words he had heard, and the girl's faltering tone, had made up his mind in a jiffy.

"John" attempted to mount to the box.

But Phil Winston was swifter.

From his own side Phil leaped up to the box.

Crack! The young reporter's fist landed under the jehu's jaw.

Even before the thud of the falling body sounded, Phil had seized reins and whip.

Slash! Our hero was still standing as the horses, suffering under the lash, bolted away at a gallop.

The swaying motion of that cab as it was rushed away would have thrown a green hand down into the roadway.

But Phil Winston, brought up in the country, was no new hand with horses.

Instead of falling, the motion jolted him back into the seat.

He was now firmly in his place, guiding a pair of maddened, spirited horses.

Behind him he heard a roar of anger and a sharp command.

But at the distance, and over the clatter of hoofs and the rattle of wheels, the voice did not sound distinctly.

It was the driver that Phil had knocked down who yelled as soon as that fellow could pick himself up.

"I guess the people inside didn't hear," throbbed Phil, listening for a hail from his "fares."

Around two corners he pulled his fresh, spirited team down into a slower trot, though he still moved them at a very respectable jog.

"Now I've got time to think over what I've been doing," quavered Winston, with a sudden shock at the heart. "If Carroll was really on the square to-night, then I reckon I've dished myself into the dickens of a scrape!"

But there was nothing to be done for it now. He had

acted on the impulse of the moment—on the bare suspicion of a girl's dread.

"If I've done a fool thing, there's nothing for it but to take my medicine like a little man," he smiled, grimly, to himself.

The real newspaper man must always be prepared, in many a way, to face all kinds of music, and Phil Winston had in him that much of the true reporter.

The distance to the Prentiss residence, at the further end of the fashionable section of the city, was not quite a mile away.

Driving such horses as these, it was not long ere our hero turned the corner nearest to the Prentiss home.

"Whew!" he whistled, as he glanced ahead down the street. "What's the mob for?"

Outside of the Prentiss house, on the sidewalk, stood a uniformed policeman and two men in plain clothes.

Up on the steps were three or four servants and two men whom our hero did not at first recognize.

"Gracious!" gasped the boy on the box; "I've put my foot in it. The driver I knocked off the seat has telephoned ahead, and this mob is waiting to jug me!"

But, as he got just a little nearer, he recognized with a start that the two young men with the servants were reporters on two of the city's rival newspapers.

"They're on hand to see me jerked, are they?" gritted Phil.

Yet, as coolly as he could, our hero drew up at the curb before the Prentiss home.

His cap was pulled well down over his eyes. He was rather surprised to note that the two reporters did not seem to be paying any attention to him.

The instant he had stopped the horses Phil climbed down on the side away from the cab.

Someone on the sidewalk opened the cab door.

Then Phil, crouching, hiding, ready for a sprint, got a jolt that made him shiver.

For the voice of Fred Carroll cried out, as if in consternation:

"What's this? The Prentiss——"

Right there, as if he had spoken in sheer, amazed impulse, Carroll checked himself.

Then he went on again, more soberly, and in a voice whose tone trembled slightly:

"Miss Prentiss was taken ill on the way home."

"She seems unconscious," remarked the policeman

"I—I believe she is," Carroll admitted.

"Chloroform!" sniffed the policeman.

"Don't stand there like an idiot," blazed Carroll, in sudden, pretended anger; "I'll carry Miss Prentiss into the house. You get a physician, officer."

him. "It's my business to stay here until the young lady gives me an account of what's happened. And you're Mr. Carroll, aren't you, sir?" turning to the railway magnate's nephew.

"Yes; this young lady's cousin," Carroll admitted, as he stepped out to the sidewalk.

Then he turned to lift the unconscious girl out of that atmosphere of chloroform.

Carroll raised the insensible girl in his arms and started up the steps with her, and giving orders to the servants that sent them scurrying on ahead.

The policeman followed Carroll into the house. The two reporters tried to, but the officer shut the door on them.

The remaining plain clothes men from the police department remained beside the carriage.

Down to him came the two reporters, repulsed at the door.

"This looks mighty strange, Mac," observed one of the reporters.

"Strange enough," Mac admitted.

"What can the driver tell us?" suddenly suggested the other reporter.

Phil heard the question, but he smiled grimly enough.

For, when the plain clothes man and the two reporters came around the cab to interview the driver, there was no "driver" there.

Profiting by the excitement, Winston had stole backwards across the street, keeping the carriage between himself and observation.

Now our hero was standing far back in the deep shadow of the area doorway opposite.

He could hear, though he could not see or be seen.

"Funny! Did the driver go into the house?" he heard the plain clothes man demand.

Phil chuckled over the bewilderment of the trio who were seeking him.

They soon gave up the search, which left our hero to himself and his own thoughts.

"That policeman is a wonder if he don't arrest Carroll!" throbbed the boy. "Carroll was plainly amazed at finding himself at Beth's home. He chloroformed her and expected to stop at some other place. Whew! How easily he could have disposed of Mr. Prentiss in the same way? And, by hokey, I believe he did do that to Mr. Prentiss. Carroll, it isn't going to be hard to follow your trail, unless the policeman arrests you. By ginger, I hope the cop doesn't do a fool thing like that—not until you've taken me to Mr. Prentiss, anyway!"

Across the street plain clothes man and brother reporters seemed to have give up looking for the late "driver."

A doctor came swiftly along the sidewalk, accompanied by the other plain clothes man.

Under cover of the doctor, both reporters succeeded in getting inside the house.

Outside Phil and the carriage horses appeared to be the only living things.

CHAPTER III.

TRAPPED BY FORGETTING TO THINK.

"You go for a doctor," asked the policeman, turning to one of the plain clothes men who had been standing with

"Is this a good time to shift my post a bit?" Phil wondered, after the lapse of a few minutes.

But just then the front door at the Prentiss house, across the way, opened.

"Carroll coming out!" throbbed the watchful boy. "Bully for the police! I was afraid they'd lay hold of him and spoil my chance of shadowing the fellow. Carroll, you're sure enough the chap who caused the disappearance of Mr. Prentiss!"

Fred Carroll came hurriedly down the steps, glanced swiftly around, then started away at a swift walk that had something cat-like about it.

The next time that Carroll turned he caught sight of our hero walking along on the opposite sidewalk.

But when, a block further on, Carroll once more turned, he did not see the boy.

For Winston was on his guard.

To be seen once might do no great harm, but to be caught again on the trail would only serve to make Fred Carroll sure that he was being deliberately followed.

But Phil was on the trail, just the same, and on the same side of the street now.

He was employing some of the tricks of "shadowing" that he had heard older and more experienced reporters describe.

For instance, in this part of the city there were low iron fences in front of each yard.

Every time that our hero saw Carroll about to turn he instantly vaulted one of these fences into the yard, remaining out of sight for a few seconds, then going once more in the chase.

Or, if opposite a doorstep, it was a simple matter to dart in on the steps.

Either trick required hardly more than a second, which time was always afforded by the turning around of the game in this stealthy chase.

It was not long, however, before Carroll's course took him away from the fashionable residence part of the town.

Carroll now followed one side street straight along.

"Headed for the waterfront," quivered the young reporter. "Well, that's the most natural place—if he's going to Mr. Prentiss. The waterfront has many a queer hole where a prisoner could be hidden away."

As pursuer and pursued drew out of the fashionable into the more crowded parts of the city, there were more people on the streets.

Phil could now follow, at a little distance behind, without much risk of his pursuit being detected by Carroll.

"A swell fellow like him wouldn't be going down in this part of the town unless he had something queer on hand," reflected Phil.

And now he noticed, as Carroll passed under the glow of an electric street light, what had escaped him before.

The railway magnate's nephew, while still wearing the same topcoat, had doffed his evening clothes for a light brown suit that would attract less attention in this part of the town.

"Carroll doesn't live at the Prentiss home," reflected Phil. "Yet he must keep some of his clothes there, or he has borrowed a suit from some of the men servants."

At this late hour the throngs on the street were composed mostly of roysterers finishing up an evening in the saloons.

They were a noisy, boisterous crowd, composed of the workingmen who feel obliged to hand a part of their wages over to the saloon keeper.

Yet their presence suited Phil right down to the ground now, for, mixed with these workingmen were a few rough characters.

Carroll, plainly to avoid attention from the rougher part of the passersby, hurried along without stopping to look sideways or to the rear.

Phil had, therefore, only to keep along at the same kind of a pace.

But, at last, even the saloons grew fewer and fewer and the sidewalk throng lighter. Once more the young reporter trailed his man with great caution.

Then, arrived at the waterfront avenue, Carroll crossed that now deserted thoroughfare.

Just opposite was a lumber yard that fronted on the water. Over the big gate was a huge sign on which, even in the night, our hero could read the names:

"Devine & Carroll."

"Oho! So our young man is in business for himself," mused watchful Phil. "I didn't know that. But this lumber yard gives him a bully waterfront place for hiding a prisoner—if he has one."

Carroll had halted before a smaller gate, close to the bigger one for lumber trucks.

Both gates were locked securely at this time of the night.

"Letting himself in," Winston discovered, as he saw his man take out a key and fit in the lock of the smaller gate. "Blazes! I hope he doesn't lock it on the inside!"

Mentally our hero calculated the height of the very high fence that shut out the lumber yard from the waterfront avenue.

"I could climb that fence easily enough, of course," muttered the boy. "But anyone watching could see me doing the climbing trick. And Fred Carroll is watching, if this is his nest for his evil work."

Click. Opening the smaller gate, Fred Carroll passed on into the lumber yard, closing the gate behind him.

Tap! tap! sounded his feet.

"He's walking through the yard," thrilled Phil. "I can sneak across the street now."

In another jiffy our hero was at the gate.

"Glory!" he throbbed under his breath, "Carroll didn't shut the gate hard enough to lock it!"

Stealthily, our hero pushed the gate half-way open.

He was about to step into the lumber yard, then drew back.

"How safe is this going to be?" he wondered. "A fel-

low who'll play Carroll's game might not hesitate at murder!"

For a moment Phil hesitated, undecided. It was the first time that he had been called upon to risk running himself into danger of being murdered.

"Bosh!" he gritted. "If I can't take a chance, I'll have to get out of the business. A reporter's life isn't much of anything else but taking chances."

With that, he stepped resolutely though stealthily into the yard.

There were the tall piles of lumber, with the narrow passages between.

Listening, Phil heard steps a little way ahead.

"That's where Carroll is moving," he thought. "He's making more noise than I dare to."

Still following the sound of steps ahead, Phil stole onward, until——

As he passed one pile of lumber an arm shot out, a stick landed across his head, and the boy staggered down to the ground.

Before he could defend himself, Fred Carroll leaped out and down upon him.

Psst! At the low signal two rough-looking fellows darted forward to help Phil's assailant.

"Sit on him!" ordered Carroll, in an ugly tone. "If he makes a sound, kill him!"

In a twinkling the two roughs were pinning the boy by sitting on him, and the one nearest Winston's head whipped a knife into view.

"I thought so!" chuckled Carroll, with grim savagry. "From what happened to-night, I felt sure of being followed!"

CHAPTER IV.

TWO CAN PLAY FOXY.

"Wind the kid up now, and have done with him!" gruffly advised the ruffian with the knife, who rested his left hand against Winston's windpipe.

"I've got to," nodded Carroll, an ugly, greenish light burning in the eyes with which he regarded our hero as he stood looking down at the trapped youngster.

"Can I say a word?" Phil asked in a low, hoarse voice, for the pressure on his windpipe barely allowed him to breathe.

"Several," mocked Carroll. "Fire away!"

"Why are you treating me like this?" Phil demanded, innocently.

"Why did you follow me in here?" retorted Carroll.

"I didn't know that I did."

"Humph! Not much use in your talking, then. Why did you come into the yard at all?"

"Wanted a place to sleep," Phil replied, on the spur of the moment.

"What's that?" came sharply from Carroll.

"Fact," Phil lied, desperately. "Broke and wanted some place to pass the night. Saw the gate open and thought I could find some sort of bunking place in here."

"Don't try to lie to me," hissed Carroll, menacingly.

"What need have I got to lie?" Phil demanded.

"Go through his pockets," Carroll commanded one of the men. "We'll see if he's too poor for a night's lodging."

Right then and there Phil saw the uselessness of his lie, and regretted that he had not thought out a better one.

"Three dollars and a quarter," reported the ruffian who had rustled Phil's trousers pockets.

"Look higher up for more," advised Carroll.

And now Winston's heart almost stopped beating.

For the man who had held him by the throat suddenly whipped the boy's coat open.

There, on the boy's left vest front, gleamed a little, round disk of silver.

"What's this?" snarled the ruffian who had first discovered the badge. "Police?"

"Worse—ten times worse!" faltered Carroll, who had dropped to his knees to get a close look at the gleaming badge. "That's a press badge. He's a reporter!"

Carroll's face was of an ashen hue. He choked now, as if unable to speak further.

"'Morning Globe?' " shivered Carroll, after swallowing hard. "So—that's what you are!"

"Well?" demanded Phil, coolly, for he felt, suddenly, that great coolness was all that possibly stood between himself and death."

"You're a reporter?" insisted Carroll, fearsomely.

"One of them," Ben admitted, with well-assumed indifference.

"One of them? What do you mean?"

"There are three more trailing me. They know I'm here," Phil lied desperately.

"Rush back to the gate! Give a signal, if anyone tries to get in!" Carroll quavered, turning like a flash upon one of his men.

That worthy departed on the run, gliding in and out of the piles of lumber like a man long used to dodging.

"If they look they won't find this kid in here!" snarled the brute with the knife.

In another instant life would have been over for Phil Winston.

But just in that twinkling Carroll, with an angry cry, struck out with his left hand, pushing the brute back.

"Stop, I tell you!"

Snarling, displaying a set of ponderous, ugly teeth, the brute glared up at his master.

"You understand what will happen to you if you make a break of any kind?" leered Fred Carroll, wheeling and smiling savagely down at the boy.

Winston not answering, the young man turned to his creature.

"Get up!" he ordered. "You're so crazy that I'm afraid you'll use that knife at any second."

"I ought to!" growled the wretch.

In his insane greed for blood, the fellow bent over Phil once more, pressing the keen edge against the young reporter's white throat.

"Quit, I tell you!" raged Carroll, in a low but aroused voice. "Stop that—until you get orders."

The brute not taking the knife edge away from quivering Phil's throat, Carroll once more closed in, pushing with his left hand against the fellow's breast.

"Get up and stand back! Are you boss, or am I?"

With a suddenness hardly to be looked for, the brute leaped to his feet.

But he stood there, glaring like a beast at his master.

Carroll looked him over coolly, however.

It was a tense moment, when a word hastily uttered might lead to a life and death clinch between this pair:

"Now's the only chance!" throbbed Phil.

It was the one moment in which neither was looking at him

Up! Phil was on his feet like a streak.

As a part of the same movement he snatched the revolver from Fred Carroll's hand.

"Kill him now!" roared the brute, leaping forward with his knife uplifted.

Carroll, uttering a cry without words, wheeled around to find Phil distant a dozen feet and the bright muzzle of the pistol covering him.

"It's my game now!" throbbed the young reporter. "I'm as ready to kill as any one. Follow me, if you dare!"

In that same second he wheeled, darting through the lumber yard.

Swearing, both jumped ahead in pursuit.

Crack! Phil Winston turned and fired.

His blood up, he cared not at all whether he killed one of this pair.

But his shot went just a trifle wild of the brute's head.

Both stopped, in paralyzed amazement, for they had not looked for the boy to have grit enough to shoot.

Whizz! Phil was again in motion for the gate of the yard.

He came out from among the lumber just in time to spy Carroll's other man out in the street just past the gate.

Seeing the fugitive, and alarmed by the shot he had heard, this fellow leaped forward to slam the gate shut.

"Stand away from there or I'll kill you!" Phil ripped out in hot earnest.

Crack! Not waiting to see whether he was obeyed, Phil Winston sped another shot, ahead of him this time—aimed at the fellow at the gate.

"Yes; aimed! In his present mood of righteous self-defense Phil wanted to hit.

Plainly he came mighty close to the mark, too, for, with a yell, the fellow ducked, dodged, then ran down the avenue as fast as his legs could carry him.

Just in time our hero wheeled to find the brute about to spring upon him.

Crack! The third shot. It took effect in the wretch's knee, sending him to the ground.

Panting, pallid, Carroll halted behind his man.

"You young fiend!" he snarled. "What are you doing?"

"Shooting," said Phil, coolly. "What did you expect? Want one yourself? I'm in the business now!"

"You're brave when you've got the only gun in the crowd!" sneered Carroll.

Running feet sounded up the street that led down to the waterfront.

"The police!" faltered Carroll, turning paler than before.

"To be sure!" Phil mocked. "Honest men don't need to fear 'em!"

Then, just as suddenly, our hero made up his mind to make himself scarce.

"At this hour of the night the police will serve it out to all the other papers!" he shivered, apprehensively. "Wow! I must keep this great beat to myself!"

"Shut the gate, if you want a respite," he whispered suddenly, to Carroll. "Don't run, or your man will be found and he'll give you away. Shut the gate—quick!"

Seeing that the boy with the pistol meant it, Carroll leaped forward to slam the gate shut and lock it.

Click! At that sound, Phil Winston took to his own heels, gliding down the waterfront avenue in the deepest shadow that he could find.

Carroll, in the meantime, shouldered the task of lifting his brute and getting that wretch hidden behind a pile of lumber.

Not until he was two blocks away did swiftly, stealthily, Phil Winston draw up.

"It seems queer to be throwing the police off the scent," he panted, as he rested in a doorway. "But if the police got hold of this thing now every other morning paper would have it. It wouldn't be my beat at all. Besides, if hounded too hard, Carroll might make way with his uncle. If he has only me to deal with, he may dicker long enough to give me a show to rescue his uncle."

Rush! A policeman on the run went by the door, caught sight of our hero, wheeled and came back.

"What you doing here?" demanded the cop, suspiciously.

"Laying low until I find out what's loose around here," Phil answered quickly.

"I guess you're about as loose as anything," snapped the officer.

"Don't be a fool," grinned the boy, pulling back his coat lapel to display the reporter's badge so well known to the police.

"Oh," said the cop, and took away the heavy hand he had rested on the boy's shoulder. "Say, I heard shooting up there."

"So did I. That's why I ducked in here."

"Come on, then, and we'll find out what it was," proposed the policeman.

"Don't believe I'll go," smiled Phil. "There may be some shooting left up ahead there."

The cop wasted no more time, but plunged forward at a run.

Left to himself, our hero made up the nearest cross-town street.

At the first cab he encountered he stopped.

"Take me to the 'Globe' office. Drive like the mischief," he ordered the driver.

Phil was off, bumping over the rough pavements of this part of the town. But he was not long in making Newspaper Row.

"Come upstairs and get the order for your money," Phil directed, and led the way to the elevator.

Eaton, the city editor, was alone in his office when Phil bounded in, his eyes shining with excitement.

"Give this man his order for hack-hire, please," begged the young reporter. "Then I want to tell you something big."

Mr. Eaton glanced in mild surprise from under his eyeshade.

"How much?" he asked the driver.

"Two dollars, sir."

Eaton wrote the order hastily on a pad, gave it to the driver, and added:

"Take that to the counting-room and get your money."

Then, after the driver had disappeared:

"Now, Winston, I hope you have something really good to tell me. What's it about?"

"The Prentiss affair," quivered Phil. "I haven't found Prentiss yet, but I've got all the other threads of the story. I think, sir, we will have Prentiss within a few hours."

"Prentiss?" cried Mr. Eaton. "It's more than merely finding him, my boy. His absence will bring about a smash in the Great Gaul's affairs. If the railway is hurt, half a dozen local banks will go to the wall. In fact, a big money disaster is threatened in this old town if Prentiss doesn't show up quick. Now, for your story."

This Phil told as quickly as he could, with one eye on the city editor's clock, for our hero had a good idea of how long a time it would take to write out his amazing story for the morning paper.

Eaton heard him through with the calmness of the veteran journalist.

"Is that all, lad?" he asked, when Phil had finished.

"All, sir."

Eaton toyed with Carroll's handsome revolver, which Phil had laid on his desk as a proof of the story.

"Winston," said the city editor, slowly, "I don't believe we'll print this yarn—not this morning."

"Not print it?" gasped Phil, going white and rising in his sheer astonishment. "Mr. Eaton, do you think I've been lying to you?"

"Not a bit of it, lad. Sit down again, and listen. Now,

see here, don't you realize the situation? Prentiss isn't a prisoner at that lumber yard, or anywhere near it. Carroll knew that he must be shadowed, to have such a miss happen to his plans for abducting Miss Prentiss. So Carroll led the chase to the lumber yard, and left the gate unfastened, just so that his shadower would follow him in and get caught. It was a good trick."

"But how could he have his men on hand there, too?"

"By sending a veiled telephone message from the Prentiss house before he left it."

"Then——"

"Now, Carroll knows from what quarter the pursuit comes. You did just right in not going to the police with your tale. Fearing exposure, Carroll would have his uncle's body cut up in small pieces and destroyed so that it could never be identified. Then what could we prove?"

"But Carroll, who is in hiding by this time, will wait for the morning papers. When he sees that there's not a word, even in the 'Globe,' he's likely to think we're holding off until we hear from him, and then he may send word and try to open up a deal with us. We want this story, and we want a beat on it over the other newspapers, but what we want, first of all, is to save the Great Gaul from financial disaster and to prevent a bad business panic all around. Do you follow me?"

"Yes, sir."

Phil, in fact, saw the clear good sense of it all. A trained newspaper man like this chief of his could see further than any younger man could.

"In the meantime," Mr. Eaton went on, "we'll keep right on at the case. I'll send for Vaden and put the story in his charge. You and some others can help Vaden."

"Vaden?" burst indignantly from Winston.

"Well? Have you any objection to him?"

"I'll take help, sir, provided I'm left in charge of the story. I must be the boss, though, in getting this story for the 'Globe.'"

"Must?" echoed the city editor, looking at young Winston in sheer amazement. "Winston, am I not the city editor of this paper?"

"That you are!" assented Phil; "but I've done better on this thing than any of your older men. I must remain in charge—absolutely in charge of getting the whole of this story, or——"

"Well? Or——"

"Or I resign from the staff at once!"

Phil went white, next flushed, as he delivered this jolt, but he meant what he said.

His resignation would leave him free to go to any other newspaper with the knowledge that he had of the Prentiss case.

"See here, Winston," cried the city editor, irritably, "you've got to be reasonable and take a sensible view of this thing."

"Just what I'm trying to do, Mr. Eaton. But I carried this thing as far as it has been taken, and without any help from your older men. If I'm reporter enough to do

that, I'm reporter enough to carry this story through to the end. Mr. Eaton, I've waited for my chance to show whether or not I'm a real reporter. I've got to have this chance, and I mean to have it! Now, what do you say, sir?"

Eaton no longer hesitated.

"You're taking me where the hair is short, and I've simply got to give in," replied the city editor, slowly. "Very well, you shall have charge of this story, and you shall choose your own men to help you. But if you fall down on this affair, then——"

"I understand, sir," flushed Phil. "If I fall down, I'm through here."

"Through in a minute!" assented the city editor.

"I'd deserve to be," gritted the young reporter.

"Then that'll be the case—win or git!"

CHAPTER V.

THE GIRL WHO HELPED.

Phil Winston paced nervously in the back room of the drug store nearest to the Prentiss residence.

A few hours of restless sleep the boy had secured at the hotel nearest his office.

Then, sharp at six, he had been called.

Taking a cab at that early hour, he had been driven to the side door of the drug store, and had stepped hastily inside.

Winston's driver was a man whose stand was in Newspaper Row. This jehu was well known to the reporters and could be trusted.

In a twinkling the cab had driven off again, but had gone to a point to which our hero could telephone if he wanted the driver again.

The drug store, which had just been opened, was presided over by one sleepy-looking clerk.

"What can I do for you?" he asked, eying the reporter.

"Come into the back room a moment," asked Phil, leading the way.

The clerk followed, curiously.

"You look like a fellow who would like to earn a little money," Winston hinted, smilingly.

But the clerk drew up stiffly.

"See here, young fellow, if it's any crooked business that you expect from me, there's the door!"

"Not even a little thing—for a ten-dollar bill?" insisted Winston.

"There's the door out!"

"Good!" agreed our hero, cheerfully. "That sounds as if you were the kind of man I want. I need a square man—and that means that I don't want any dirty work. But I mean what I said about paying ten dollars for a few minutes' work."

"What's the game?" demanded the clerk, suspiciously.

"Do the Prentisses trade here?"

"Yes; sometimes."

"Then I want you to take a bottle of medicine to Miss Beth Prentiss, and——"

"Hold on! Stop!" breathed the clerk, angrily.

"Oh, I don't care what the medicine is," Phil went on earnestly. "Take sugar and water, if you want. I'm not trying to poison her. I want you to hand her a note that no one else sees."

"Excuse me," gruffed the still suspicious clerk. "This looks fishy."

"It wouldn't, if you understood it," Phil retorted, now displaying his badge for a brief instant. "Young man, you've got a chance to help the Prentisses out in their troubles, if you're quick enough. And all you've got to do is to take the medicine, and slip the note to her at the same time. That note will ask the young lady to meet me here in this back room to help me in finding her father."

The clerk, mistaking Phil's badge for a police one, had become a bit less suspicious.

"Why don't you go to the house yourself?" he asked.

"Best reason in the world, my dear fellow. I don't know who may be watching that house. I don't want to have it known that I've seen Miss Prentiss. Now, will you take the pretended medicine, and slip the note into her hands—for the ten dollars that I promised you?"

"It—it begins to look straight," murmured the drug clerk.

"And it is straight. And here's the ten and the note. Now, will you get over there? I'll watch the store for you."

"It's too early to go over there yet," the clerk argued.

"Oh, no, it isn't," Phil retorted, quickly; "it's getting on toward seven o'clock, and a girl who's crying her eyes out for news of her father is pretty sure to be awake. Come, now, hustle, won't you?"

After a moment's hesitation the clerk departed on his errand.

Phil had plenty of money about him now.

When a reporter on a big newspaper starts on a great case he is always supplied with funds by his paper.

"I got the note to Miss Beth," the clerk reported, coming back to the store.

"Did you get any answer?"

"No; but I whispered that some kind of detective was here waiting for her to bring her answer."

"Good enough—if she comes!"

So now Phil was pacing in that back room, wondering and wondering whether the girl would, after all, heed such a strange note.

The minutes slipped by. Another clerk had come to help the first now, as the hands of the clock worked around toward half-past seven.

"She's had more than half an hour to make up her mind in," muttered the boy, uneasily. "What's keeping her—if she's coming?"

From where he stood in the back room he could watch

the street along which Beth would come, if come she did. There was a painted window, but Phil knew how to scrape clear a spot as big as a pea. Through this he could watch without fear of being seen from the street.

From the window he took another feverish turn across the room.

Then once more he looked out.

"Hurrah! Here she comes—if only she's headed for here!" quavered the young reporter.

It seemed like ages, but before long Beth was in the outer store.

Then she came back, conducted by the clerk who had carried her the note. That clerk ushered her into the room, then closed the door.

Beth looked at Phil as if she would pierce him through and through, but our hero stood the scrutiny to her satisfaction.

"You are Mr. Winston?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Phil Winston, at your service, Miss Prentiss," he replied, eagerly.

"Your note told me that you are the only one alive who can give me correct information about my father?" she went on, still eying him searchingly. "And you are a reporter?"

Phil showed her his badge, then handed her a letter from Eaton, the city editor.

Beth read it through quickly.

"This is all very strange," she murmured, only half-believingly.

"But I have convinced you, Miss Prentiss, that I am a reporter?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Then listen, please, to all I have to say."

And Phil told her the whole amazing story.

Beth did not appear to be as much surprised as he had expected.

"I am going to be frank with you," she flashed back at him.

"Above all, that is what I wish, Miss Prentiss.

"You have not told me anything that surprises me as to my cousin. I have long detested Fred Carroll."

"Yet you were with him, on the best of terms, at your father's office yesterday afternoon."

Beth started, looked inquiringly at the boy, and then went on:

"That was because he is my cousin, and it is well to be on apparent good terms with one's relatives. Fred even wanted me to marry him."

"Oho!" flashed Phil. Then, as he looked at the girl:

"He is hardly to be blamed for that, Miss Prentiss."

"My father's great wealth was the attraction," the girl answered, steadily, and without flushing. "Fred has some money, but not much."

"Did your father favor him?"

"At first, until he learned how much I disliked my cousin."

"Then, why should Carroll want to abduct your father?"

"To work upon me, perhaps. Since you were the one who saved me last night, you know all about that part of the affair."

"Except that I am wondering how Carroll explained your being chloroformed."

"Of course he was lame about that," Beth smiled, bitterly. "He told the doctor that he had taken chloroform for a headache; that he had dropped some on his handkerchief to inhale, and that he did not notice how it had affected me until the carriage stopped at our door."

"Lame enough," commented Phil.

"It was, but I pretended to accept it, for it quickly flashed on me that my father was decoyed off by Fred Carroll in some way very similar. I had to make believe accept his story, so that I may keep on the right side of my cousin until our family lawyer has gotten the case well in hand."

"You have told your lawyer?" asked Phil, with a start.

"Not yet, for he is out of town, or was last night. But I shall go to him this morning—as soon as I am through here, in fact."

"I beg you not to," pleaded the boy.

"Not tell my lawyer?" she demanded.

"If you do, Miss Prentiss, I'm just about certain that you won't have your father safe in a hurry. I'm the only one who has all the real threads of this case in hand. If you work through the lawyer, instead of through me, you will certainly fail."

"But you can go to my lawyer with me!" she proposed, eagerly.

"Certainly not!"

"Why not?"

"We-ell," hesitated Phil, and then added: "It would be against my orders from my paper."

The real reason was that Phil Winston, with his chance to make his name in the newspaper world, did not mean to play second fiddle to a lawyer and let the latter get all the credit.

"Now, Miss Prentiss, let me tell you our plan—my paper's plan. In the first place, we want you to disappear, also."

"I? Disappear?" cried the girl.

"Yes; we want you to fade out of sight, so that no one can find you."

"Why?"

"Simply to get Carroll guessing and uneasy. He won't be able to figure what's up. When we get him on the anxious seat it will be easier to bring him to quick terms."

"What is your—your paper's plan?"

"First of all, we want you to seek secret refuge—hiding—in the Convent of the Sacred Relics."

"But I am not acquainted there," Beth replied, the puzzled look in her face deepening.

"It isn't necessary for you to be. Our paper has already arranged with the Mother Superior at the convent to receive a young woman who wishes to remain in seclusion for a few days. I will take you there—at once. You will

be safe there, and you will have Fred Carroll on the rack of suspense."

"I—I am afraid I can't make any such arrangement with a stranger," Beth replied, slowly.

"Simply because you don't feel that you can trust me in such a strange matter. You're quite right in that. But you'd trust my paper, the 'Globe,' wouldn't you? If you knew that the 'Globe' really asked you to accept this plan as the only sure one of finding your father?"

"If—if I really knew—perhaps."

"Nothing easier than to find out," prompted Phil. "The telephone number of our office is 2,000 Gloucester. You can satisfy yourself of that in the directory. Mr. Eaton, my city editor, is there at this hour—by arrangement. There's the telephone over there. Call up the office and talk with Mr. Eaton, won't you?"

Even the naturally suspicious Beth could hardly help believing in the sincerity of this eager, flushed youngster, who stood looking into her eyes with a look of such great honesty.

"I—I certainly don't object to talking with your editor," she replied, and crossed the room to the telephone.

Within five minutes Beth hung up the transmitter.

"I am satisfied," she said, simply.

"Then you will be guided by the 'Globe?'" pressed Phil.

"I will be guided by you," she answered, flashing a swift look at him.

"And you will stay at the convent, not communicating with your lawyer or with any of your relatives or friends?"

Beth drew back, a bit disturbed.

"Must I promise that?" she asked, slowly.

"Most certainly. Miss Prentiss, if you break even a bit into our plans, you will upset them."

The girl hesitated.

"Perhaps, Miss Prentiss, you don't realize the great power of a big, modern newspaper. You don't understand that we have more men and better facilities than other papers. You don't understand how long a newspaper's arms are, and how far they can reach out."

"It must be so," she admitted, "or else a boy like you would not have been able to accomplish all that you have done in my interest."

"Then you agree to all I ask?" Phil insisted, pressing home his point.

"Yes, yes. I am in your hands."

"Good! Then when you leave here, it will be in the cab with me."

Beth flushed a bit, hesitated, then took a furtive peep at Phil's strong, confident, self-reliant face.

Had she but guessed it, he was a very different youngster from yesterday.

The "kid" of the 'Globe' office had become a man!

Just a few minutes later the closed carriage drew up at the side door.

The two drug clerks had been impressed with the fact that they must, on no account, betray the fashion in which

Beth had left the store. Beth herself had told them this, and Phil had emphasized it by a cash present to each.

Then, behind drawn curtains, the young people were bowled across the city.

In time he ushered Beth in through the doorway of the convent, where she was already expected.

"Remember!" thrilled Phil, as he took her little hand in his at parting. "Stand by us, and we'll win out for you! And we'll keep you posted on the news."

Beth's eyes filled with tears as she bade him good-by. Winston, who never did like the sight of tears, hurried away.

He left the convent in the cab.

Within ten minutes' walk of Newspaper Row he left the cab, going forward on foot.

"If Carroll hasn't already started some move towards dickering with us," reflected the young reporter, "he sure will when he finds that his pretty cousin has disappeared from the face of the earth. The city editor isn't such a fool when he directs a case like this. I wonder if Carroll will come himself."

Phil had turned into a crowded side street near the Row.

Then something happened so suddenly that our hero had no chance to realize it.

Out of the surging crowd just one man emerged and caught the boy's eye.

It was the unwounded one of the pair of Carroll's helpers of the night before.

Something steely glistened.

Swift as a flash the wretch aimed a pistol point-blank at Phil Winston and fired.

CHAPTER VI.

FACE TO FACE.

"Murder!"

That was the yell that went up from the horrified passersby.

The suddenness and meanness of the crime took their breath away.

They saw a man and a boy grapple in the same instant, saw the gleam of the pistol barrel and the flash from the muzzle, heard the report.

Then they saw man and boy go down together.

It looked like a death grapple.

Phil Winston meant it for that, too.

But in going down, his foot was twisted under him.

Wrench! A shoot of pain went through that suffering foot and ankle.

Swift as thought the murderous assailant wrenched himself free of the boy.

A flashing gesture with the pistol, and the horror-struck crowd fell back, making a clear lane of escape for the man with the gun.

Phil, too, sprang up, blood pouring from a wound in his hand.

The fugitive was now running at top speed, none daring to stop him.

Phil started to run in pursuit, but his weakened ankle wobbled.

He fell against the plate glass window of a drug store, leaning there for support.

"Catch that scoundrel!" shouted Winston. "Stop him!"

But none started in pursuit.

It was nobody's business to chase a madman with a pistol—until a policeman arrived on the run.

From Phil and the crowd the cop got his directions.

Then off at full speed went the bluecoat.

"He won't catch him," uttered Winston, in disgust, for already the man with the pistol was out of sight around a corner.

So sure was he that his assailant would not be caught that Phil hobbled into the drug store.

A bleeding furrow across the back of his hand had been cut by that bullet.

Just the instant before the shot was fired our hero had caught sight of the weapon and had grabbed at it.

In this way he had turned aside a bullet aimed for his heart.

But the leaden missile had ploughed its way across the back of his other hand.

This was quickly remedied by washing and by pasting a strip of flesh-colored courtplaster across the back of his hand.

In the same back room of the drug store Phil had the ankle washed in lotion and well rubbed.

"I can walk, with a hobble," he grunted as he tried.

"If you want to use that foot, the best plan is to keep on using it," suggested the druggist. "It'll get stiffer and stiffer from rest. Use may work all the soreness out."

"Use will cure, eh?" cried the boy. "That's the most comforting news I ever heard, for I never wanted to use my feet as much as I do now."

The policeman not having returned, Phil found his way out through a back door and made a short, though painful "cut," to the 'Globe' office.

There he found Mr. Eaton. The city editor can go without sleep as well as the reporter can at a time when a great news story is "on."

"All well so far," nodded the city editor, with a smile. "Now, we can afford to rest a little while, to see what move the Carroll crowd will make."

Phil sat down for a few minutes, to see what the other morning papers had had to say about the disappearance of Bertram Prentiss.

All of the papers had long articles about the missing railway president, though not one of them, not even the 'Globe,' contained an inkling of the real story.

"I can't give this foot too much rest, or I'll stiffen up," grunted Phil at last. "I've got to get out and exercise."

"I'm going into the managing editor's office, then, to lie down on the sofa," replied Mr. Eaton. "My day assis-

tant will be here in less than an hour and I'll leave him a note to call me if I'm wanted."

"What can I do on this job?" piped up a voice from a dark corner of the city room.

"You, Dave? Oh, I'd forgotten you," laughed the city editor.

"That's always the way," came a rueful, complaining voice, and then the alert but rather poorly dressed figure of a boy of fifteen came into view. "I'm always forgotten when there's anything real to be done."

This was Dave Bliss, the night office boy, who had stayed overtime with his chief.

Dave considered himself as "good" as any reporter on the staff. He burned with eagerness to prove it.

"There doesn't seem to be anything for you to do now," remarked the city editor. "You may as well go home, Dave, and get some sleep."

"Sleep?" snorted the boy, indignantly. "There's a big story on, or you two wouldn't be here at this time in the morning. Can't I do anything? Say, can't I?"

"I know just how he feels. I felt that way myself," Phil murmured to himself. "Let him stay, won't you, Mr. Eaton? He may be of use to me."

"Use," echoed Dave. "Of course I'll be."

"Then go out and help Winston to keep from falling. Take care of him and his bad ankle," smiled the city editor just before he closed the managing editor's door from the other side.

"That's it," uttered the office boy, bitterly. "I want to do a reporting stunt, and I'm toled off for a trained nurse. Oh, this is life—this is!"

"Never mind," returned Phil, as they went down the stairs together. "You stick to me, Dave, for you're under my orders now. If anything happens I'll find something for you to do."

"Say, will you, now?" insisted the office boy, eagerly. "Something big? You're on the Prentiss case, ain't you?"

"Very much on it," Phil laughed.

"What'll I do first?"

"When we get in the street, don't walk with me, but near. Keep your eye on me. If anyone speaks to me, or anything happens, just keep your eyes open."

"Then what?" Dave demanded, eagerly.

"If you don't know what to do, then, you're no newspaper man—that's all."

"Thanks!" retorted Dave, drily. "Much!"

Phil stepped out on the street first. Dave followed some little distance at the rear.

For half an hour our hero strolled around through the shorter thoroughfares close to Newspaper Row.

Once or twice he turned, but always to find Dave close at hand, though the office boy did not appear to be watching him.

"That youngster's going to do for a shadow," thought Phil. "He——"

Winston stopped short, halted and challenged by a pair

of dark eyes that gleamed at him from out of a dark doorway.

Well back in the shadow stood Fred Carroll.

He was scowling, savagely, but beckoned to our hero.

Without hesitation, Phil turned and stepped in under the doorway.

"Been looking for me?" smiled our hero.

"Guess!" sneered Carroll.

"I guess that you very much want to see me, and find out what I know, and what I'm doing," Winston went on, coolly. "Well, as you know, I represent the 'Globe.' My people have this matter in charge—even to being in a position to decide whether you shall go to jail or not. Do you know what would be the best thing for you, Carroll?"

"What?"

"Come around to the 'Globe' office with me and see one of our editors. Tell him where you took your uncle and what made you do it."

"Don't talk quite so loudly," ordered Carroll, showing his teeth in a snarl.

"Don't try to frighten me, or to order me about," smiled back Phil. "I'm not afraid of you. All I've got to do is to holler for the police, turn you over, and there you are."

"On what charge?" jeered Carroll, now cool again. "Abducting my uncle? Prove it! What happened in the lumber yard last night? You'd be the only witness for your side. No, no, Winston, you can't hold the police over me. You couldn't make a charge that'd hold water."

"Then what did you want of me, anyway?" Phil insisted, curiously. "And how do you happen to know my name?"

"I know more than that about you," retorted the rascal.

"See here," cried Phil, with a sudden pretense of anger, "you haven't stopped with hurrying your uncle off into captivity. What have you done with your cousin, Beth Prentiss?"

"What do you mean?"

"Come, now," snorted Phil, "don't try any of that. Beth Prentiss has vanished—has disappeared as if the earth had swallowed her up!"

"What's that you say?" gritted Carroll, his face paling, as he gripped our hero's arm.

"That shot went home hard," thought the young reporter. "He hadn't heard about Beth yet. Her disappearance has spoiled his scheme somewhat."

"What did you say about Beth?" insisted her cousin.

"Disappeared, and you know where," returned our hero, stolidly.

"Upon my soul I didn't know it, and can't believe it, either," faltered the young rascal.

"Tell that to the marines!" snapped Phil, clever disbelief written all over his face.

Carroll was actually shaking with emotion over this news.

"Beth's flight upsets all his plans," divined our hero.

"Now, see here, Winston, I'll tell you what I want of

you," went on Carroll, laying what was meant to be a coaxing hand on the boy's arm. "There's no use in our being enemies."

"Of course not," the boy returned, drily.

"Join hands with me."

"How?" queried the boy, turning in genuine surprise.

"Drop your newspaper. What do you get there? A few dollars a week. Join hands with me, and I'll make it worth your while. Help me, and I promise you—a fortune!"

"Where'll it come from?" flashed Phil.

"Never mind that. Never mind my plans just now. But there's a fortune ahead in my scheme. Join me, and part of it is yours. See here!"

From his inner coat pocket the rascal drew out a flat, thin roll of crisp new bank notes.

"I can pay you something down, you see," whispered Fred Carroll, his eyes glowing.

"How much?" demanded Phil, thinking.

"One thousand dollars!"

"Pshaw!"

"Think how long it would take you to earn that on your paltry newspaper."

"A thousand is not up to my price."

"I'll make it two thousand, then."

Carroll, reaching into another pocket, displayed the tip of another wad of banknotes.

"Still too little," smiled Phil.

"But this is only earnest money," urged Fred.

"Too little, anyway," Phil smiled.

"But think how little you've got to do. In fact, I don't need you, Winston, for any real work. You're simply the only human being who has succeeded in getting between me and my job. You're the only fellow I'm afraid of. I don't want you to do anything for me—just go into the country with one of my men and disappear for a while."

"And disappear?" mocked Phil. "That seems to be a specialty in your line. But—no, I thank you!"

"Do you mean to stay in town and queer me?" snarled Fred.

"Perhaps. What if I do?"

"Then you'll be out of the way quicker than you think!" hissed the scoundrel. "You can't do anything against me as yet, for you haven't got the proof. But I can do a lot against you. Do you know that every large city has a swarm of men who'll take life for a small price? Winston, either you come under me and follow my orders—or I swear that I'm going to pay to have you killed—in a jiffy!"

"Good! Now, we understand each other," jeered Winston.

"Your answer, then?"

"Carroll, you're just what I believed you yesterday—an utter scoundrel!"

"And a dangerous one, as you'll find if you fight me!"

"Then fight you I shall, to the last ditch!"

Phil stepped out of the doorway, his mind bent on sum-

moning a policeman and taking a chance on placing Fred Carroll under arrest—proof or no proof.

With a cry of rage, mingled with fear, Carroll leaped after him.

Up went the wretch's hand, something flashing there. Phil turned, but too late to avoid the stroke.

Down came a knife, the blade's point sinking in his neck.

"You won't trouble me again!" flashed Fred Carroll.

As Phil Winston sank back, the blood streaming from his neck, Carroll dashed into the street.

Just a few doors away, and before anyone on the street understood what had happened, Carroll darted into a waiting cab and was whirled swiftly away.

"Now, I've got a clear field!" gasped the wretch, sinking back on the cushions.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OFFICE BOY'S STUNT.

"That was just about the time you nearly cashed in your checks."

This was the comment of the druggist who dressed and bandaged Phil's wound.

The crowd had found the boy lying there in the doorway, rapidly bleeding to death.

The crowd had roused a policeman. That officer applied first aid in a jiffy, then got the boy to the nearest drug store.

An ambulance had been summoned, but the young doctor found the druggist doing all right, and soon departed.

The point of the knife had come within a quarter of an inch of the jugular vein.

Had the knife entered just on the vein there would have been scant chance of saving the boy's life.

As it was, the wound was nearly an inch deep.

But powders had been applied to stop the bleeding, after which the cut was stitched.

Then sticking plaster and a light bandage had closed up the opening.

"You'd better go to your doctor and then get home for the day," advised the druggist.

"Not with my day's work to do," said Phil, gritty though his face was pale from shock and loss of blood.

To the policeman Winston had already given his name and business and a pretended description of his assailant.

As to that assailant, our hero had declared, stubbornly, that he did not know who the fellow was, or why the stabbing had been done.

"Now I'll get back to the office—what's left of me," muttered the boy.

He still limped a bit, but the wound in the neck did not show.

That had been inflicted deep down under his collar, so that his clothing concealed it.

Crosby, the day assistant city editor, was at his desk when Phil entered the editorial rooms of the "Globe."

"You look as if you'd been through a wreck," commented that editor, looking up.

"Feel like it," smiled Phil, ruefully.

"That you, Winston?" hailed a voice from the managing editor's room.

"Yes, sir."

Then Mr. Eaton came out.

"Anything new, my boy?"

"I've just seen Fred Carroll," and our hero hastily told what had happened.

"Where was that little pest, Bliss, all the while?" cried Eaton, angrily.

"Oh, he was attending to business, you bet," Phil returned, with alacrity.

"Or lost sight of you in the crowd," suggested the city editor.

"Perhaps, but I don't believe it, sir. Wait. And now, Mr. Eaton, you'd better get three or four good reporters at work."

"What for?"

"Why, to hunt the city for Carroll. When found we want that scoundrel arrested."

"Get about four of our good men by 'phoning to their homes, Crosby," the city editor ordered his assistant.

So quickly does a sleeping reporter arouse when the telephone bell rings in his sleeping room that within a half hour the four men so summoned were in the city room of the "Globe."

They were out again within five minutes, one under orders to remain near the Pelham Club to intercept Carroll if he showed up there.

Another was sent to Carroll's lumber yard, a third to the Great Gaul railway offices and the fourth to try to trail the young scoundrel among his acquaintances and cronies.

If Carroll still remained in the city there was every reason to believe that one of these reporters would locate him.

"If you find him," was Phil's last word, "have him arrested."

Then our hero remained at the office.

"You're in no shape to go out, so you'd better lie down on the managing editor's lounge," advised Mr. Eaton. "Now that Crosby is here, I'm going home."

But Phil steadfastly refused to lie down.

He walked back and forth through the long, narrow city room, gently exercising that lame ankle.

"What are you waiting for, anyway?" Crosby demanded.

"Waiting to hear from Dave."

"Bosh!" snorted Crosby. "That boy behaved as most kids do—fell down at the important point in the story."

"I don't believe it," Phil retorted, stubbornly. "Yesterday you said I'd fall down on a big story, didn't you?"

Crosby snorted and went on with his work.

Half an hour later the office telephone bell jangled.

"Mr. Winston!" called the day office boy. "Someone wants you at the telephone."

"Hullo," Phil hailed, seating himself at the instrument.

"Hullo, Mr. Winston," came a shrill, excited voice over the wire. "This is Dave Bliss."

"Good! I knew I'd hear from you. Where are you?"

"At the Great Gaul depot. So is the fellow who stabbed you."

"The deuce you say!"

"That's right, Mr. Winston," Dave went on, earnestly. "Maybe you thought I was slow in not helping you when you was stabbed. But I just figured I'd better follow the fellow who did it. He was off like a streak in a cab. I was off like another streak, Mr. Winston—on the trunk race behind the cab. Your man drove to a theatrical costuming parlor. Say, you wouldn't know him now. He's shaved off his black mustache, and he wears a light brown wig that's a dandy on a fit. He has eyeglasses and is rigged up like one of those hunter chaps. He has a shotgun, too. Oh, you'd never know him for the same fellow."

"Is he going anywhere?" Phil demanded, anxiously.

"Going anywhere?" repeated Dave, in great excitement. "Just that! He's bought a ticket for Covenden."

Covenden? That was a long ride from the city, and fairly well up in a wild bit of mountains through which the Great Gaul railway passed.

"What time does his train go?" Phil demanded.

"Eleven-two!"

"Great Scott!" roared Phil. "And it's within three and a half minutes of that now."

"I know it, but I couldn't telephone before. There's another train in an hour. You'll follow, won't you?"

"Won't I, though?"

"Good! And I'm going on the same train with the crook. I'll keep him in sight until he reaches Covenden. And, say, Mr. Winston, you be on the lookout at each station. If Mr. Crook gets off at any station this side of Covenden, I'll leave a note to be handed to you by the station master. And—whoop! I've got to run for my train. Good-by!"

Ting! Just one stroke of the telephone bell, and hustling Dave was off the wire.

"You'll change your notion about Dave Bliss being a dummy, won't you?" Phil demanded, after he had hurriedly detailed his information to Crosby.

"Well, you've got plenty of time before you take that next train," mused the day assistant.

"Time enough for you to send an office boy down on the run to get a box relay from the Western Union people," Phil urged.

"A box relay?" Crosby repeated. "What for?"

"I suppose you know, sir," Phil returned, with some irony, "that a box relay is an instrument that can be connected with a live telegraph wire anywhere, and then that box relay, with its batteries and sounder, becomes a telegraph office. Well, the wires run through the mountains up around Covenden, but the telegraph stations are a

good many miles apart. If I have a story to send in a rush I'll need a box relay very likely."

"And an operator?" asked Crosby, touching his bell.

"Operator nothing!" Phil retorted. "I'm my own operator at a pinch. I've been used to sending messages my own town before ever I saw the city."

The office boy was despatched in a hurry. He returned with a box relay and with a permit issued to Phil Winston to tap the company's wires if he found it necessary so to do.

The noon train bore Phil Winston out of the Great Gaul station.

Having taken his seat in the smoking car, where he could be more at ease, with his box relay in a grip at his side, Phil opened a novel that he had bought at the newsstand.

There were not more than a half a dozen men in the car. Phil glanced them over just after the train had started.

"No one that I need to watch out for, I guess," was his decision as he settled back in his seat.

But he could not read.

He was trying to puzzle out what could have been Fred Carroll's motive in abducting his uncle.

Certainly it had stirred up trouble enough in the board of directors of the Great Gaul railway.

Yet how could Carroll profit from the possible great loss to the railway that would follow the sudden and prolonged absence of the railway's president at this critical time in the company's affairs?

And why attempt to abduct Beth?

Of course, the last move was understandable, if Carroll really wanted to wed the girl.

Yet why abduct Mr. Prentiss at all?

"Oh, it's too much of a puzzle," sighed Winston. "The answer is—find Prentiss."

Yet this was just what the young reporter hoped to do on this very trip.

If Fred Carroll had undertaken a journey so remote from the city it was only because, in some way, the railway president had already been spirited up into the wild, desolate country around Covenden.

"Carroll wouldn't get so far away from the old man as that, at such a critical point in the scheme," Phil conjectured. "But how did he ever get the president of the railway off a prisoner over his own road?"

In the next instant the young man could have kicked himself for his own stupidity in asking such a question.

"Got him away in an automobile, of course! In ten hours a good automobile would have the prisoner up in the country around Covenden."

The remembrance of that shotgun made Phil grimace a bit.

"The fellow who'd knife me, in a crowded city street would never hesitate to fill me up with buckshot in a wild bit of country."

Then came a thought that made the boy almost jump out of his seat.

"Is Carroll's trip nothing but a decoy to trap me off to a place where he can finish me?"

But this thought was almost at once dismissed.

"Carroll either believes that he did kill me, or else that he hurt me too badly to follow. But in that case he may be only going into hiding until he finds out whether he's wanted for the crime."

There were, in fact, so many speculations possible as to the reason for his enemy's flight to the mountains that Winston sighed and gave up all speculation.

"It's wise to wait until I know," he concluded.

The train was stopping at the first station.

Mindful of hustling Dave's plan, Phil rose, carrying his precious box relay with him to the platform.

But the station master here seemed not to be looking for anyone.

At each succeeding station Phil went to the platform.

Had our hero but known it, his movements gave a good deal of satisfaction to one quiet-looking, middle-aged man with a low, animal-like brow, who sat in about the middle of the car.

This individual did not seem to be paying any attention to the young reporter, but he was, none the less.

"That's the kid. I'd know him without a description," murmured the low-browed one. "Lord, ain't he green, though? Seems bent on attracting attention to himself."

This certainly was a fault with Phil.

Like all boys lacking in experience, he allowed the restlessness that surged up within him to be seen in his actions.

A man who had been through the mill, no matter what his excitement, would have seemed to be asleep instead of interested in his trip.

It was six o'clock in the evening before the train was due at the little station of Covenden.

At 5:40 the train left Delby behind, and the next stop was to be Malton.

Just as the train pulled out of Delby the low-browed one rose from his seat and moved down the aisle toward Phil's seat.

"Thought you might like some figs," hinted the low-browed one, sociably.

He offered Phil a box half-filled with the pressed fruit.

"I am hungry a bit, thank you," smiled Winston.

"Eat hearty, then," smiled the stranger, seating himself in the seat just ahead of our hero. "I've had my fill already. Finish 'em up."

"I may not have any time for supper when I reach Covenden," murmured the boy to himself.

These two were now the only passengers left in the car.

Phil ate rather greedily, for the figs tasted good over an empty stomach.

"Malton! Malton!" cried the brakesman.

"My station here," announced the low-browed one, rising. "Well, good-by, lad!"

"Good-by, and thanks for the figs," answered Phil.

"Oh, you're welcome." And there was a strange look in the fellow's eyes as he hurried from the train.

"Are we on time?" asked Phil, as the conductor came through after the train had started.

"Not quite. It's eighteen minutes to Covenden, so we're a few minutes late."

"What kind of a place is Covenden?"

"Wild."

"Any town there?"

"Nothing but the depot and the station agent's cottage."

"Where's the town?"

"There ain't any."

"The postoffice?"

"In the depot."

"Oh!"

"Blazes!" ejaculated the conductor. "What's the matter?"

For Phil had suddenly fallen back in his seat, gripping with both hands at his abdomen. His face was as white as chalk, and his breath came gaspingly.

"Sick?" demanded the conductor.

But into Phil's mind a suspicion of the real truth suddenly flashed.

"Poisoned!" he moaned, bending forward and rocking slightly as he gripped tightly at his abdomen.

In truth he was deathly ill and in great pain.

"That fellow—he gave me figs; there are people who've sworn to do me up," Phil murmured, weakly.

That conductor was a man of action. Swift as thought he leaned over, got one of the figs and tore it open.

"Paris green, by hokey!" he roared, as he regarded the little green specks that dotted the inside of the fig.

"Get a doctor—if there's one on the train!" Winston appealed, faintly.

"There ain't. I know all the passengers that's left aboard. Not a doctor among them."

"Can we get one—at—Covenden?" Phil whispered, his breath coming faster and shorter now.

"Not one within eight miles!" choked the conductor.

"I'm done for—then!" announced Phil.

He staggered up, then fell in the aisle, rolling over in his agony.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN EVIL NIGHT.

"Good Lord! I can't let a fellow die that way!" muttered the conductor.

He thought swiftly for a moment.

"There's old Mrs. Jones—she travels with a lunch basket. She may have mustard with her!"

Before this had all flashed through the conductor's mind he was traveling swiftly through the train.

In the third car back he came upon the middle-aged lady whom he sought.

Mrs. Jones, having heated a pot of water over an alco-

hol stove perched on the car-seat in front of her, was in the act of pouring a handful of tea into the water.

"Stop that!" roared the conductor, snatching the pot of hot water from before the woman's startled eyes.

"Got any mustard?" he demanded, hoarsely.

"Why, law sakes——" began the woman.

"If you've got any mustard, give it to me like lightning!" roared the conductor. "There's a young man's life at stake in the smoker."

That roused the woman to action. Fumbling in her lunch basket she brought out, sure enough, a little tin box of yellow mustard.

Without a word the conductor turned and flew back to the smoking-car, gathering in the brakeman as he went.

Phil still lay on the floor of the aisle, rolling in agony.

"Make him sit up—hold him in his seat," ordered the conductor, breathlessly.

Then, dropping a liberal handful of the mustard into the hot water, the conductor stirred the powder with his finger, regardless of the heat.

"Here," he ordered, pressing the pot to Phil's lips. "Drink this stuff—no matter how hot it is."

Hot mustard water acts as an emetic.

Phil drank the stuff gaspingly.

Almost in a moment it warmed his stomach up.

Then, retching heavily, he began to throw the stuff off.

But the second he stopped vomiting the conductor forced him to swallow the rest of the mustard water.

More vomiting followed.

"The mustard water is gone," the conductor muttered aloud. "I'm blessed if I know what to do next!"

"What ails the boy?" quietly asked Mrs. Jones, who had followed.

"Paris green."

"Then he wants to drink this milk," suggested the woman, holding forward a bottle in which there was at least a glass of milk.

Phil took it as ordered. It felt grateful to his now raw stomach.

"That'll lay the Paris green, now you've cleaned his stomach out," nodded the woman.

"Is it milk enough?" asked the conductor.

"Lord, no! He wants quarts of it."

"Covenden, in a minute now," muttered the brakeman, after looking out of the window.

"Cheer up, lad. We'll get you through this yet," encouraged the conductor, slapping Winston's shoulder.

Then the train was run into Covenden.

Leaning on the two railroad men, Phil was helped to the platform.

Seeing them coming, the station agent hurried forward.

But Phil's mind, off of death now, was active on his newspaper work.

"Any word waiting for me here?" he asked, though rather faintly.

"Yes; if your name is Dave Bliss," replied the agent.

"It is," nodded Phil, for he at once realized that that bright office-boy had left the note thus addressed in order that Winston's name, which Carroll's crowd might recognize, would not appear.

"Never mind notes now," urged the conductor. "Get any milk at the depot, Smith?"

"Some for my supper."

"Trot it out swift, then, and hustle over to your house for more."

A liberal allowance of milk, following the use of the mustard water, pulled Phil through, though it left his stomach wretchedly weak.

And now the train, delayed by a few minutes, pulled out again, though not before our hero had thanked everyone concerned in saving his life.

"How'd it happen?" asked Smith, the station agent, curiously, after the train had gone.

"Mistake," replied Phil, briefly.

But Phil was speculating over the office boy's note, which had read simply:

"Fellow got off here. Still following."

Dave inquired which way the writer of the note had gone, but on this point Smith had no information.

"It looks as if Dave had the case, instead of me," smiled Phil, grimly. "I hope, though, they ain't mixing things up for him the way they've done for me."

"Going to wait here a while?" asked the station agent, pausing with the keys in his hand.

"Yes; I think so."

"Then I won't need to lock up. This bag yours?"

Winston gave a great start as he remembered the bag, which the brakeman had been thoughtful enough to put off for him.

"It's mine," said Phil, briefly.

"I'll be back about nine o'clock, if you're still here," nodded the agent. "Come over to the house if you get lonesome."

Left by himself, our hero did not long remain at the station.

"I can be found here too easily, if people are looking for me," she decided grimly.

On a side track there was a freight car with the door open.

Into this the young reporter climbed, all but closing the door.

He could still command a view of the station.

"If I'm guessing right about Dave," murmured the young reporter, "he'll come back here as soon as he has any real news to tell."

The sun went down, darkness soon following.

Phil was about to venture out of the car when he heard a low sound close by. It was the signal whistle used between members of the "Globe" staff.

Returning the whistle, our hero softly pushed the car door open.

Dave was there on the ground waiting for him.

"I know where your party went," whispered the office boy, excitedly. "I trailed him right down to his stopping place."

"Where?" throbbed Phil.

"Up at the end of a gully, about two miles from here."

"What kind of a place?"

"It's what's left of an old saw-mill," Dave replied.

"Can you lead me there now?"

"Straight as a string—if you can stand the trip. Say, you look kinder used up," Dave finished, anxiously.

Phil smiled ruefully.

"If I'm not used up, Dave, it's not the fault of the enemy.

"But must you go to-night?" persisted the office boy, himself as fresh and bright as a new dollar. "It's a rough road, Mr. Winston, and you look at the end of your rope."

"I'm going, just the same," gritted Phil. "I can't sleep again until I've seen this thing through."

So Dave led the way along one of the two roads that wound away from the depot.

They did not talk much, and even when they did speak it was in whispers.

They left the road soon, Dave leading the way through a forest.

To our hero's surprise, his foot behaved better as they progressed, though his head was meanly light.

Then they reached the gully.

"Less than half a mile to go now," whispered Dave, as they turned in between what had been the two banks of a stream in days gone by.

It was pitch dark in here, for the trees grew heavily along either bank, and the boughs interlaced overhead.

Moreover, the footing underneath was decidedly stony in many places.

"Less'n a quarter of a mile now," Dave whispered, encouragingly.

"Glad it ain't another mile," sighed Phil. "My bad ankle is grumbling some."

But they plodded on, until——

Flash! Bang!

A shotgun roared out from a clump of bushes hardly more than arm's-length away.

With a scream of agony, Dave Bliss went down to the ground.

Whump! Ere Phil could turn a heavy blow from behind stretched him flat and unknowing on the ground.

CHAPTER IX.

A DISCOVERY GREATER THAN A BATTLE WON.

"Yes, that's the boy!"

Fred Carroll so announced in a voice expressive of the greatest satisfaction.

Phil came to just in time to hear the words.

But the young reporter felt too ill and weak to take much interest in anything just then.

"How on earth did he get way up here?" growled Carroll. "I thought I had finished him in town. But, by Jove, I can make sure of it now."

More reason, this, as Dave dully thought, for concealing the fact that his consciousness had come back to him.

"He must have nine lives," snickered another voice that Phil well remembered. "It was only by a fluke that I didn't get him in town with a bullet this morning."

Flare! Phil knew that a match had been lighted, and was being held close to his face.

He closed his eyes the tighter, determined to betray no sign of life.

"Ouch!"

A drop of red-hot sealing wax had been dropped on his skin.

The boy could not keep back the cry that this scorching brought to his lips.

"Playing possum again!" jeered Carroll. "Yank him to his feet, Jim."

Dave opened his eyes in time to find the face of the fellow who had shot at him in town close to his own face.

And now, for the first time our hero realized that his own hands were tied tightly behind his back.

"Glad to see you, son!" hailed Carroll, gleefully.

But Phil did not answer.

His mind was busy with taking in his surroundings.

The place in which he found himself looked like a long-unused room in a mill.

The windows were four in number, but heavily boarded on the inside.

There was absolutely nothing in the way of furniture or fixtures in the room.

There were two lanterns on the floor.

Carroll and Jim were there, and two dark-faced men who looked like Italians.

"Thugs, all of 'em!" throbbed the boy. "Sure, I'm in a nice place, with a fine crowd. And poor Dave! What of him?"

"You remember the warning I gave you in town, don't you, boy?" leered Carroll. "I swore I'd have you killed if you didn't join me."

"Well, I've joined you, haven't I?" Phil demanded, grimly.

"A little too late for your own safety, though."

But Phil faced his enemy unflinchingly.

"If it's all up with me," he resolved, "I won't help matters any by showing cold feet. There'll be some satisfaction in dying game, if that's all that's left for me."

Carroll suddenly chuckled as if in high good humor.

"Jim," he ordered, turning to his henchman, "bring in the other guest."

With a nod Jim picked up one of the lanterns and left the room.

He was soon back, pushing before him an old man at sight of whom Phil Winston could not repress a shout of exultation.

He had at last found Bertram Prentiss!

The railway president, whose hands also were bound, seemed to have aged twenty years in a little more than that number of hours.

"Uncle," announced Carroll, sneeringly, "this enterprising young gentleman is Mr. Philip Winston, of 'The Globe.' Ever since you disappeared he has been untiring in his efforts to find you. I suppose, after the fashion of reporters, he wants to interview you."

"A reporter?" queried Mr. Prentiss, looking over sharply. "Nonsense! He's only a boy. Fred, this is another lie of yours."

"Your nephew is quite right, sir," Phil broke in. "I am a 'Globe' reporter. Yesterday afternoon I was down to report the meeting of your railway's board of directors. When I heard of your disappearance I remembered a look of hate that I had seen your nephew give you down at your office. I put two and two together, and so the whole 'Globe' staff was put on the trail of Mr. Frederick Carroll."

That young scoundrel gave a start of disagreeable surprise.

"Your nephew, Mr. Prentiss, is bound to be run down. The 'Globe' staff is engaged in running him to cover now, and if necessary all the other newspaper staffs in the country will get busy, and hundreds of detectives will be called in. When a newspaper once furnishes the clew, a criminal's career is a short one."

"Entertaining—quite so," sneered Carroll. "But I want to be quite fair to all sides. Uncle, you've got the latest news about your certain rescue. But this boy reporter hasn't got what he was after—an interview with you."

"But first tell me about my daughter—Beth!" implored the old man, tremulously. "What about her? She is—"

"Safe!" clicked Phil. "Absolutely so."

"You can assure me of that?" cried Mr. Prentiss, tremulously.

"I give you my word of honor, sir, that Miss Beth Prentiss is safe in a place where your nephew can never find her, and where she will be protected."

At this Carroll bit his lips, and looked as if he meant to interfere. But he thought the better of it.

Will you tell me, sir," begged Phil, "just why your nephew has committed such a crime as he has done in your case?"

"Greed of money—the greatest cause of crime," answered the old man sadly.

"How did he expect to get it by making a prisoner of you?"

"Through my daughter."

"How?"

"It was a simple plan," throbbed the old man. "Yet

only a criminal could have thought it out. Young man —"

"Winston is my name, sir."

"Winston, my nephew places my wealth at twenty millions of dollars. He may be wide of the mark, but that is not for me to say.

"But to go back to yesterday. He made an appointment to meet me outside of my offices. He told me that he was in great trouble, and that a word from me to a bank's president would save him.

"Winston, I was an idiot enough to believe, and I met my nephew. He got me to step into a cab. The next thing that happened was that he forced a chloroformed cloth under my nostrils, and held me tightly until I fainted.

"After that I found myself coming back to life, but in a closed automobile that was traveling fast. This morning some time we arrived here.

"Late this afternoon my nephew arrived. Then he unfolded his plan to me. I must write a note to my daughter that would compel her to marry this criminal nephew of mine. I must also agree that, when he brought my daughter and a marriage certificate to me, that I would settle upon him the sum of ten million dollars. If I refused I was to be murdered, and my daughter to be followed and hounded to her death. There, Winston, you have the whole plan."

"And quite worthy of the scoundrel who formed it!" uttered Phil, contemptuously. "But it won't go through, Mr. Prentiss. Search as he may, Carroll will never find your daughter. She's past his power of search."

"So, then, my dear nephew," mocked the railway president, turning upon the wretch, "you see that I have not the slightest reason for giving in to any of your demands."

"Not even to save your own life?" questioned Carroll, sternly.

"My life? Bosh! You are too cowardly, Fred, to have me murdered when you can profit nothing by it."

"I might make such seemingly determined efforts to avenge your murder, uncle, by trying to run down and convict the murderers, that Beth would marry me out of sheer gratitude."

Mr. Prentiss paled at the cold-blooded threat, but Winston broke in decisively:

"Your daughter, Mr. Prentiss, won't be deceived. She's in possession of all the information that the 'Globe' men have about this scoundrel."

"Stop that brat's talking!" commanded Carroll, wrathfully, turning to Jim.

"I'm through talking now," Phil rejoined, coolly.

"Fred," appealed the old man, in a strong, brave voice, as he turned to his nephew, "since all your success in this wild, foolish, criminal enterprise depends upon my aiding you, won't you take my word for it that I'd die sooner than give in to you by one inch? Can't you realize the simple uselessness of what you're doing?"

"I've gone too far, uncle, to realize anything but the fruits of success," retorted the nephew, stubbornly. "Either I conquer you, uncle, or I wind up a bad business by killing you."

"Killing me? Pooh! You will not do that when you can gain nothing by it. You are too great a coward to take life, unless you're cornered."

"Jim," commanded the nephew, "bring that long coil of rope."

"Sure," grinned the fellow, and once more disappeared with the lantern.

But he was back within five seconds, so it seemed.

"Climb up and make one end fast over the rafter," was Carroll's next order.

In the work that followed the two Italians, as silent as ever, gave their help.

The rafter was a dozen feet or so from the floor.

From this the rope swung.

At a whispered word from Fred one of the Italians disappeared, returning with a barrel.

"Now, let our guests imagine what we intend for their entertainment," laughed Fred Carroll, as Jim began to tie a noose in one end of the rope.

Phil glanced at the railway president, who looked back at him.

Unalterable grit was written alike in the faces of the young boy and of the old man.

Yet both half hoped that this preparation so dramatically carried on was but a bit of clever "bluff."

"Up with the kid!" Carroll ordered, carelessly.

One of the Italians lifted our hero to a stand on the top of the barrel.

Nothing was to be gained by jumping down again, which would only result in his feet being tied before he was placed up there again, so Phil stood as he was placed.

Then Jim climbed to the barrel-top beside him.

Sugg! The noose was dropped swiftly about the boy's neck, the two Italians holding the other end of the rope.

Right then Phil Winston realized that this was not mere play.

Frantically he strove to jump down. He succeeded in upsetting the barrel and giving Jim a tumble to the floor.

But that was all, for the Italians hoisted the hanged young reporter up close to the beam.

Phil Winston, as the strangling went on, kicked convulsively in his fearful torment.

But the Italians coolly carried their end of the rope to one side of the room, where they made it fast over a hook.

"Look at that swinging body, uncle," commanded Fred Carroll, directing the old man's fascinated gaze. "You have taunted me with being afraid to take life. You shall stay here to-night, and look often at that dangling, lifeless body. You shall realize, to-night, the truth—that I am not too big a coward to take life!"

CHAPTER X.

THE FLOP OF FATE.

"Cut that unfortunate young man down!" implored Mr. Prentiss.

"Not until you give in, my good uncle!"

"You infamous scoundrel!"

"Hard words win no battles here, uncle," sneered the nephew.

"Cut him down, I say."

"Do you accede to all my terms, then?" demanded Carroll, swiftly.

Old Bertram Prentiss hesitated.

He knew that Phil Winston had risked his own life to save him.

Nor was Prentiss the kind of man to go back on those who had come to grief on his behalf.

He hesitated, then brightened a bit.

"Cut the young man down for a few moments, Fred, and then we will discuss terms."

"There are none to discuss," retorted the nephew, sternly. "Agree to all, or your young friend goes on swinging."

"Yet even now, Fred, it may be wholly too late to cut him down."

"That's your chance, uncle. Every second increases the danger that it will be too late. See! The young reporter is not moving his legs as much as he did. He is dying fast!"

"Some money, Carroll, but leave the girl out of the terms!"

"Beth and the millions must go together! Speak quick, uncle, if you want to save that reporter's life."

"I——"

President Prentiss's speech was cut short by the sharp crack of a firearm.

Thud! Phil's body had fallen to the floor, the rope severed by a bullet.

Crack! Crash! One light was out. A third report, and the glass of the second lantern scattered over the floor, the flame flickering out.

"A trap!" screamed Carroll, showing the white feather once more in this terrifying crisis.

He himself led the flight to the only door of the room.

Jim and the two Italians, in a panic, were close at his heels.

"Whoever our rescuers are, I beg them to come quickly," shrieked Mr. Prentiss. "I am tied, and cannot go to Winston's aid. He is strangling to death!"

An instant's delay. Then in the darkness the scurrying of a single pair of feet was heard on the floor.

Scratch! flare! In the dim ring of light made by that solitary match the old man saw a young boy's white face.

That youngster located Phil's inanimate body, and rushed toward it.

In the darkness Prentiss heard soft but frantic work, as this sole rescuer cut away the noose from Phil's hands and from the reporter's wrists.

"Have you freed him wholly?" cried Mr. Prentiss.

"Yep," came somewhat quaveringly from the boy.

"Then free my hands, that I may help in restoring Winston."

In the dark the cords over the railway president's wrists were very cleanly cut away.

"Now we must do everything possible to bring Winston back to life," quavered Mr. Prentiss. "Help me, please. You shall be well rewarded."

"Hang the reward!" came the retort, in a voice of shrill contempt. "But I'd better guard this door for all our lives."

"Give me your match-box, then."

That was passed to the railway man in the dark.

By the aid of a little light Mr. Prentiss made an examination of Phil's condition.

"There seems to be a bit of life left," murmured the old man.

Then he worked at inducing artificial respiration.

He worked with such good effect, too, that soon a long, gulping sigh came from between the reporter's lips.

"How you getting on, mister?" asked the boy from the doorway.

"Famously! splendidly!" came the eager answer.

"Keep the good work going, then," came the cool response.

Soon Phil was able to speak.

"What has happened? Why is it so dark?" he murmured faintly.

"We've been rescued, lad!" thrilled the railway president.

"Then why are there—no lights?"

"They've been shot out."

"Who rescued us?"

"Guess, Mr. Winston," came the boy's dry voice from the doorway.

"Dave Bliss?" thrilled Phil.

"O. K. Ring off until your line's working better."

Uttering a sudden cry, Bertram Prentiss lighted another match, holding the flame close to his fingers.

"Blood?" he shuddered. "Where did that come from?"

"The wound in my neck must have been opened by the rope," hinted Phil, coolly.

"Wound?"

"Oh, just a little knife tickle that I got in town on this case."

"Let me see," pleaded the railway president, striking another match, and holding it between a trembling thumb and finger.

He gave a gasp as he saw the wound, now looking more ugly than ever on account of the inflamed edges around the wound.

"My lad, you've got to have this attended to at once," quivered Mr. Prentiss.

"Nearest doctor ten miles off," said Phil.

"At least we can get out of doors. The starlight will give us some chance to see what we're doing."

"Come on, then," whispered Dave. "I'll go first, with this pistol ready. You two keep close. There may be big trouble ahead."

Prentiss helped the young reporter to rise. They moved slowly, but so did the office boy ahead.

Through a short hallway they went, then coming to steps that led down to the ground.

"This way," whispered Dave. "I know the lay of the land."

Young Bliss led the way to a clump of bushes under the trees some two hundred yards away.

As he went, Dave hobbled badly.

But no one spoke. All were wondering how far away Carroll and his wretches were.

At last they crawled into the bushes, then listened a few moments.

"All safe, I guess," said Dave. "But I'll watch, while you, mister, see what ails Mr. Winston's wound."

"But you, Dave? You're limping badly."

"Oh, I've got a little right to," said the office boy, indifferently. "When those chaps opened fire on us with the shotgun, I got a charge in the left leg. The shot is under the skin yet, I guess, but I stopped most of the flow of blood."

"Attend to Dave now, please," begged Phil.

"Don't you listen, mister," begged the office boy.

"I shan't," smiled Mr. Prentiss, warmly. "Your wound, Winston, is the more dangerous."

The sticking plaster was still there, however. With the aid of water that Dave brought it was soaked off, then re-applied, and bound with Mr. Prentiss's handkerchief.

Then, while Phil stood up, gripping the pistol that young Bliss turned over to him, the railway magnate examined the office boy's leg.

There was but little bleeding, though. The shot had passed well under the skin, showing only raised purple blotches.

"I can't do anything. It needs a surgeon, at the first moment," advised Mr. Prentiss.

"And now let us think what we're going to do," urged Phil.

"Get to the Covenden railway station, if we can," urged Mr. Prentiss.

"And face four armed enemies?" inquired our hero.

"They would not dare molest us there."

"Wouldn't they, though?" demanded our hero. "That's just where they'll make for. Nor do we know how many more men Carroll may have in this neighborhood. There's only one man at Covenden whom we could count on our side, and only one at Malton. The station agent is the only man at either place. Mr. Prentiss, I'm afraid that when we strike a railway station we run into the enemy. In my belief, that's where they'll hike for, in order to head us off."

"True enough," nodded the old man, thoughtfully.

"My box relay?" throbbed Phil, suddenly. "Carroll's crowd brought that along with me, for I remember seeing it back in the mill. I must go back after it."

"Not on your life!" Dave objected. "You've got the pistol. Stay here on guard, and I'll go back."

"Who is that wonderfully bright youngster?" whispered Mr. Prentiss.

"Dave Bliss, night office boy on the 'Globe.' "

"I wonder if I could have such a youngster as that for my own private office?" hinted Mr. Prentiss.

"You couldn't," Phil smiled. "You couldn't get anybody away from a good newspaper office. The newspaper life is one that no one in it wants to quit."

"Here it is," whispered Dave, showing up again, with the bag tightly held.

"What's the plan, then?" asked Mr. Prentiss, who seemed to turn instinctively to our hero.

"Well, sir, in some way, we've got to get a few miles down the line. We want to keep away from the railway track for a few miles. Perhaps seven or eight miles down the line we can reach the track, well between stations. Then I can climb a telegraph pole, get this box relay tackled, and send a message for help."

CHAPTER XI.

TOO LATE!

"Well, hang it, we're here!" uttered Dave. "It's raining, too."

"I'm glad it wasn't many miles further to go," smiled Phil Winston.

Both boys were grit to the core, though they had suffered torments on that march of peril.

Twice in the night, for it was now just barely daylight, they had encountered Italians armed with shotguns.

Neither of these were of the pair that had been at the old mill with Carroll, which showed that plotting scoundrel had more help in these wild mountains than his hunted victims knew.

The Italians had been encountered, separately, in crossing two roads, one of which led to the Covenden depot, and the other to the Malton station.

Both had been passed in safety, by making a wide circuit around them.

But the encounters showed that Carroll was still hopelessly searching this wild country for the victims who had eluded him.

"We're not out of trouble until we have a squad of help," Phil observed, as they now crawled into a clump of bushes near the track.

"Let me see. Which is the nearest good town to send word for help?" mused Bertram Prentiss.

"The city itself," advised Phil, quickly. "If we keep hidden here we can be safe for a few hours. In that time, sir, your own people can send a train rushing through, with plenty of good, staunch railway police, who'll hunt you out along the track. And now, sir, I'm going to get up that pole, somehow, and get the box relay rigged on."

"Can you possibly climb, with that ankle?" queried Mr. Prentiss, anxiously. "Besides, it's raining torrents."

"I don't need the ankle. I can use my arms; they're strong," Phil returned, cheerfully. "The rain won't hurt me."

"Better start soon, hadn't you?" urged Dave.

"That's what I'm going to do. Every minute of delay is a chance that Carroll's crew will be around to spot me up on the pole."

"Let 'em spot, if I'm near enough," dared Dave, with a slight swelling of his chest.

He had long ago reloaded his revolver.

The office boy had also accounted for his possession of the weapon and his excellent marksmanship.

Before getting his berth in the "Globe" office, young Bliss had worked for more than a year in a target gallery. There he had picked up the fine art of shooting.

Though he did not carry a revolver, Dave had kept one of his best at the "Globe" office.

When he first started out with our hero the office boy had silently dropped that weapon into his pocket.

Phil opened the grip with trembling hands.

"Lie low in these bushes. Don't pay any attention to me, even if I'm discovered," whispered Phil, as he passed the strap of the box relay around his neck. "Remember that the one important thing now is to get Mr. Prentiss safely back to his office at the terminal station of the Great Gaul & Western Railway. It doesn't make any difference whether I'm caught, shot, or what."

Dave said nothing, but grunted.

Just twenty minutes later, trembling sadly from the strain of climbing in his weakened condition, Phil Winston sat astride of one of the crosspieces of the telegraph pole.

Two wires from the box he carefully fastened to one of the wires that connected this lonely place in the woods with the great world.

Click! click! he tried, with one finger on the key of his instrument.

Click! clicketty-clacketty-click-clack! came back the note of inquiry from somewhere on the wire.

"None of the country operators are in their offices at this hour in the morning," mused Phil.

"Who've I got?" he flashed back over the wire.

"Main Office, Western Union Company, city," came the answer.

"Try to call someone at the Great Gaul main offices," flashed Phil.

"Who are you?" came the sharp query.

"Winston, with a licensed box relay, up in the mountains," Phil sent back over the wire.

"Hold on where you are. I'll try the Gaul."

Some minutes of anxious waiting followed. Then:

"No answer from the Gaul."

Phil whispered the information down to Mr. Prentiss, who leaned against the pole.

"Of course not," sighed the old president. "I didn't look for such luck. Not even the train despatcher is due for an hour."

"Wait a moment," whispered Phil, softly.

He clicked the key once more, to this effect:

"Main office, try with all your might to get me on to a live wire into the 'Globe' office!"

Ah! Something doing, now!

"Globe!" came the quick answer. "Who's calling?"

"Winston," flashed back the answer. "Who's in charge?"

"Eaton."

"Call him."

"Hello, Winston!"

"Mr. Eaton?"

"Yes. Where are you?"

"Up in the mountains, two or three miles your side of Malton. Found Prentiss, and have him here with me."

"Good! Rush story!"

"Hold on, Mr. Eaton. We're in the woods, being hunted for our lives by Carroll's crew!" Phil flashed back anxiously.

"Then send story——"

"Stop, Eaton," Phil broke in, firmly, with his finger on the key. "Don't send orders. Take 'em!"

"What's that——"

"Stand by to take my orders—the only orders that can save us or the story!"

Then, with a hard motion of the wrist, Phil jabbed out the signature:

"Winston, the man on the spot!"

"That ought to settle even a city editor," quivered the young reporter.

Plainly it did, too, for the answer came back:

"Send away. Eaton!"

Gritting his teeth tightly together, Phil sent this message with a hand that shook:

"Rouse Great Gaul people, no matter what trouble. Tell 'em to get out special express, to start at once, with everything else ordered off the road ahead of it. Tell 'em to send at least a dozen good armed men and one surgeon. Tell 'em to run train through to Malton, and then send armed men and surgeon back east along track. Tell 'em we'll signal relief party when it arrives. Rush whole business. Make Great Gaul people do same thing! That's Prentiss's orders!

(Signed) "Prentiss, Man-on-the-spot."

"Hold on for reply," came the city editor's message, clicked out on the sounder in the box at Phil's side.

Then time dragged. That couldn't be helped. It took time, even with all the facilities of a great city, to get peo-

ple out of bed and to get a great railway in instant, extraordinary operation.

"Twenty minutes gone now," called up Mr. Prentiss, cautiously.

"Humph! If you'd ever seen a great newspaper get a hump on itself when a sensation breaks loose, you'd have a mental picture of the way things are moving in town just now," muttered Phil.

"When—what——?" queried the railway president, looking puzzled.

"If that sounds queer I can't help it. It's the lingo of the newspaper office. When news is coming faster than it can be handled, and when a new thing is happening every minute, then they say that something is doing for fair."

Click! Click!

"Now," breathed Phil, ready with pencil and paper.

Back from town came the message:

"Great Gaul starts train, as ordered, within fifteen minutes. Runs on two hour and forty minute schedule. First stop Malton. Armed men and surgeon as desired. Telephoned Miss Prentiss. She insists on going, too, and will be on train. Keep up your courage and look out for yourselves until relief arrives.—Eaton, City Editor."

To this Phil flashed back:

"Bully! Thanks! Expect great 'beat' for 'Globe.'"

Then, after detaching his connecting wires, Winston slid down to the ground, exultantly reading the news to his friends.

Back into the bushes they crept, hiding and talking only in the softest whispers.

Mr. Prentiss, his watch in hand, calculated when the train would start.

"It must be leaving the main terminal now," he murmured, at last. "The fifteen minutes are up, and my people won't lose any seconds on a job like this."

Mr. Prentiss frequently held up his watch so that the others could see the flight of time.

When it seemed as though weeks, instead of hours, had passed, Mr. Prentiss suddenly straightened up.

"The train isn't more than a few miles the other side of Delby, just below here. In fifteen minutes, anyway, we ought to see our train go whizzing past!"

"Sh-sh!" whispered Phil, his finger on his lips.

Steps sounded on the railway road-bed just above them. Then the tramper came into sight.

He was an Italian, with revolver in one hand and a small package wrapped in newspaper in the other.

As the fellow stole along, he looked furtively from one side to the other.

As the three in the bushes watched, breathlessly, the Italian halted two hundred feet below their concealment.

He bent over the track for a few moments, his hands concealed by his bent back.

Then suddenly the fellow straightened up, turned, and ran back.

BOOM! There was a cloud of dust just at the point where this prowler had bent over the track.

"Great Heaven! He's blown up the track—the express will be a wreck!" gasped horrified Phil.

Like a flash he turned and snatched the revolver from Dave's hands.

Crack! Phil fired, praying aloud, almost, for the success of his shot.

Down went the miscreant, drilled through the leg.

"Put your hands up! Don't try to use your gun, or I'll kill you!" roared the maddened young reporter, darting out with Dave's weapon leveled.

Finding himself so well covered, the Italian dropped his revolver at his side.

"You cover him, Dave," ordered Phil, as his two companions moved up to him. "Kill the fellow if he tries to resist. Tie and gag him. Get his revolver, too, and then get back out of sight. Me for the top of the pole to catch the express at Delby!"

Yet Phil Winston fairly groaned with anguish at the time it took him, in his wounded, weakened condition, to make the second ascent of the telegraph pole in that driving downpour of rain.

Just as he reached the crosspiece, our hero, in a downward glance, saw the Italian, bound and gagged, lying by the side of the track, while Dave and the railway magnate crouched again in the bushes.

With fingers that trembled badly the young reporter got his box relay wires hooked on to one of the main wires.

Then his first two fingers steadied as they touched the key.

"Delby! Delby! Quick!" he signaled, wildly.

An age of awful suspense seemed to pass. Then:

Click! click! came the answer from Delby.

Phil's heart bounded with joy.

"Sold the express—track wrecked!" he flashed.

"Too late—train passed a minute ago!" came the response, in clicks that sounded tremulous.

The young reporter almost toppled from his perch.

His fight for life had been useless!

"What is it, Winston? In heaven's name—what?" called Mr. Prentiss quaveringly.

Choking back the sobs, Phil repeated the news from Delby.

"We can't stop the train then!" shrieked President Prentiss, rushing from concealment. "The half-mile below here's all down-grade! A flying express couldn't stop if it tried. Merciful heaven—and Beth on that train!"

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

Phil felt as if he must fall off his high perch with the dizziness of sheer despair.

He cared nothing whether he did or not.

Click! Click! "Hullo, Winston."

Almost shrieking at that sound from the sounder, Phil jammed his fingers to the key.

"Who's that?" he signaled wildly.

"Chambers, of the Herald. I can stop train. Will do it. Stay where you are for message."

Delirious, almost, with new hope, Phil called down the message to his friends.

Then, after minutes that seemed like ages—

Toot! Too-oo-oo-oot!

Another minute, then a click from the sounder.

"Flagged train and stopped it. Train will come forward slowly—me, too!—Chambers, Herald."

Then, indeed, Phil Winston made fast time to the ground, after joyfully calling down the news.

There was still danger that Carroll and his crew might show up ahead of the coming of the now slow train.

But at last the train came slowly creeping into sight.

Then, catching sight of the three fugitives, standing close beside the twisted rails, the train came to a stop.

Fully two-score of men leaped off and came rushing forward—the flower of the railway police and detective force of the Great Gaul & Western.

And there among them Phil caught sight of his elated rival, Chambers of the Herald.

"Tough! tough!" muttered the boy.

"What is?" questioned Mr. Prentiss.

"Why, after all I've done, there's Chambers of the Herald. I can't have that coveted 'beat' for the 'Globe' now. Chambers is here to get the story, too."

"I know about that," smiled Mr. Prentiss, earnestly. "We don't have to talk. I shan't tell him a word, Winston, unless you ask me to."

"How can you refuse, after he flagged the train?"

"That was an act of common humanity. Besides, our road usually pay a reward of a thousand dollars for such a performance. Your rival shall have the thousand—but not your great news story. Never fear, Winston! You have the whole right of way in everything to-day!"

"Hullo, old fellow! What has happened?" asked the beaming Chambers, running up.

"How did you come to be in this part of the country, and with a box relay, too?" Phil asked, quickly.

"Oh, that was easy enough," grinned Chambers. "I was down at the Great Gaul terminal yesterday. Saw you start off on the noon train. Telephoned my office I suspected you had got away on the Prentiss case. So I got orders to follow on the three o'clock train. I got up in this part of the world last night, but didn't have any luck in trailing you. So, this forenoon, I got my box relay hitched to a wire to see if I could spot any message of yours."

"Did you hear my call for help?" Phil queried.

"No; that must have gone in before I got on the wire. But say, I wish you'd introduce me to Miss Prentiss. I've been trying to get her to talk, and she says she won't open her mouth until she hears from you."

"Good girl!" observed Phil, gratefully.

"Introduce me to Prentiss, too," begged Chambers, gazing after the railway president, who had run forward to meet his daughter.

"We'll see, when Mr. Prentiss gets some time," smiled Phil, warily.

"See here," cried Chambers anxiously, "you are not going to try to freeze me out on any part of this story, are you?"

"Now, suppose I should, old fellow," Phil replied, gently. "You'll understand that I'm serving my own paper. I'm not trying to hurt you, but I'm trying to get a big beat for my own paper. You'd do the same, if the case was reversed."

That set Chambers to thinking. He was still thinking when the train, with the whole party aboard, backed down into Delby.

There a halt was made. Phil wired the "Globe" to expect a great story when he reached town.

To Dave's great delight, there was a buffet attachment to the president's private car, which was a part of the train.

In addition to that there were two day coaches and a baggage car.

Phil, in the meantime, had reached Beth's side.

"Oh, Mr. Winston!" she faltered.

The tears came swiftly to her eyes, but she held out her hand, grasping our hero's in a way that told the story of her feelings.

A wait of four hours and more was made on the side track at Delby.

During the wait the railway police and detectives swarmed the country. Carroll was caught and brought in handcuffed. Jim was rounded up with him, as were two of the Italians. Three more, in all, besides the one whom the young reporter had shot, were found and brought in.

Carroll and his henchmen were all sentenced, later, to long terms. They are still in prison—all except Carroll, who watched his chance, and hanged himself one day in his cell.

Even the brute who had been wounded in the lumber yard was found at one of the hospitals, and he, too, received his share of the law's benefits.

But to return to the president's train, when it started for town.

In the president's office on that special car were seated Mr. Prentiss, Beth, our hero, and Dave.

Outside was Chambers, of the Herald, wildly anxious, as was natural.

Inside the traveling office the whole story was gone over. Father and daughter went carefully over the points of the great story.

By the time that the train pulled in at the terminal station Phil, fagged though he was, and all but ready to drop, took a carriage at the station, and drove directly to the "Globe" office.

"Well, well, well, my boy!" cried Crosby, the day assistant, rushing forward and gripping the boy by the hand. "You——"

"Didn't fall down on my first big story, did I?" Phil smiled back.

There was no more writing for our hero.

With his friend he was perched at a desk in a big office all by themselves.

Here one short-hand reporter after another stepped in.

To them Phil gave all the material, which they hastened away in turn to write up.

Then, with the whole great story covered, our hero was through and ready for rest.

"You'll come to our home," begged Mr. Prentiss, eagerly. "I can't let you out of my sight, Winston, until you're in as good shape as you were before you started on my trail."

While all of the other papers had parts of the Prentiss story the following morning, the "Globe" was the only sheet that contained the whole wonderful story of the abduction and rescue of the president of the Great Gaul & Western Railway.

It was a big "beat," pure and simple, for Phil Winston and it made his name in journalism.

He is still on the "Globe," being day city editor at present, in place of Crosby, who has gone on to Washington as correspondent. But Phil won't leave newspaper work, and is slated to go higher.

He could leave, too, and go into railroad work, for he has an excellent "pull" with the Great Gaul & Western through being the son-in-law of that road's president.

Mr. Prentiss, through returning in season to pull the railroad out of its financial "squeeze," feels that he owes about everything to Phil.

Dave took his "step" right after the beat, by becoming a "kid" reporter. He is more than that now, and likely to be an editor soon.

THE END.

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